

FANTASY FICTION

AUGUST 1953 35c

MAG



A UNIQUE NEW NOVELETTE BY JOHN WYNDHAM
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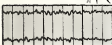
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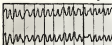
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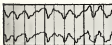
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FANTASY FICTION

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AN EDITORIAL ON DE GUSTIBUS

Probably the biggest piece of fantasy ever written was the old Latin saying: *de gustibus non est disputandum*. Anybody who can seriously believe there's no arguing about tastes hasn't been doing much listening to the conversations about him. Why my taste is right and your taste is dead wrong has been a favorite subject for argument since Adam liked Winesaps and Eve liked Jonathans.

In the case of fantasy, particularly, there seems to be a lot of disagreement. There's the school that thinks it has to be handled with the heavy hand in the Gothic tradition for fear that sunlight will kill it—having never seen the pure fantasy of a rainbow. At the other extreme, there are those who bore the very young with a saccharine case of the lovely fairies who never say a harsh word at the bottom of the garden.

There are those who think that fantasy fiction is closely related to the detective school, and that in the hands of a name writer the presence of a dubious ghost in a murder yarn is going to titillate the reader no end. Others feel that by removing all plot from a story, changing a dwarf to a swarf, and being as consciously precious as possible, you get the very quintessence of fantasy.

We find our own tastes in violent disagreement with all of them, and we also feel like arguing about it any time there's a spare millenium or two. But there's one other brand that arouses our ire even more, and that's the school which feels it has to justify fantasy on the ground that it's good for you!

Let's make ourselves clear at once. If you've picked up this magazine for any reason other than the fun of reading it, you're wasting your time! We're not in the business of supplying an outlet for your sub-libidinous urges nor a sublimation for the cellar-dwelling fancies of your subconscious. We're not in competition with psychotherapists—or even the fantasies of their search into dreams—and we don't consider ourselves competent to prescribe therapeutic treatments for your neuroses. If you insist on having all your fantasy turn out to be psychically real, you probably won't like our brand, anyhow.

We happen to believe that most readers of this magazine don't need therapy, for that matter. It takes a pretty well-balanced mind to accept fantasy as a game and enjoy it as such, without getting fantasy and fact all twisted together.

As I see it, we aren't using pure fantasy exclusively, anyhow. We leave that for the magazines that use the term "pure" to describe horror yarns, detective tales, science fiction, and other things as pure fantasy. We're publishing what we prefer to consider absolutely *impure* fantasy. We want ours dished out with a twist and a grown-up amusement at the game of playing around with fantasy. A leprechaun must automatically do certain things; we, however, would love to see what might happen if we set that leprechaun down in a bank clerk's booth and then proceeded logically with the results of his abilities and attitudes. In pure fantasy, a witch is a witch is a witch; in one of the best examples of the kind we like, a witch is every woman, particularly when she's the wife of a college professor. (See book review of *Witches Three* elsewhere in this issue.)

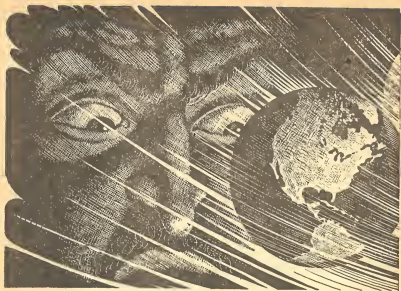
So, recognizing that fantasy is a matter of taste, we're all set to argue violently. It isn't that we don't recognize the other side's right to its taste that arouses the violence, however; it's simply that the other side always seems to be so sure that fantasy has to be pure by being all loused up with a type or a mission!

We stand by our first statement on the subject: fantasy is fun, period. It's a grown-up game for the man who has enough mental flexibility to accept a preposterous supposition and then see how logically he can follow through the inevitable incongruousness of it all. If we put fairies at the bottom of the garden, we want to know how they make out with the DDT we sprayed to drive away the flies; and if we have a ghost in a dank cellar, we want to know whether the anti-histamines might not cure his sniffles. If we have to have detective murders, we'd rather have the detective turn out to be a vampire, and the murderer a man who chews garlic, while the ghost of the dead man is a practical joker who doesn't want his murderer discovered. Finally, if we've got to get fantasy mixed up with the interpretation of sick dreams—or the sick interpretation of dreams—we'd rather see what would happen when somebody discovered the devil had a split personality. On that, incidentally, we've got a nice, wacky yarn by the old master, Clark Ashton Smith, coming up.

If you want to see fantasy used to supplement the fantasies in your own mind, or to give relief from your inability to separate fact and fancy, go to a psychiatrist. He has better reading of that sort in his office.

If you just want to enjoy yourself and have a little fun at the temporary expense of reality—well, then, Foomp to you, too! It's fun having you with us.

LESTER DEL REY



"So Sweet as Magic..."

BY BRUCE ELLIOTT

ILLUSTRATED BY EBEL

Bardoni thought nothing of pulling a rabbit out of a hat—that was his business as a magician. But when the rabbit began talking back in English, he wanted no part of it!





*"Nothing so sweet as magicke
is to him,
Which he prefers before his
chiefest bliss . . ."*

Dr. Faustus,
Christopher Marlowe

I

The night club was as quiet as it ever got. That is, there was a constant flurry of low voices as gentlemen made ungenteel suggestions to the young ladies they were with; there was the steady clinking sound of ice cubes in glasses, but aside from that and the voice of the M.C. all was still.

"But now to be serious for a moment, folks." The master of ceremonies made a hideous grimace at the word serious. "I'd like to introduce a man who'll bring you a mad melange of mirth, mystery and magic.

"Take it away, Bardoni!"

Looking neither to right or left, a caricature of an old-time magician in white tie, tails, cape, and high hat, Bardoni strode across the handkerchief-sized dance floor, rapping his cane on the polished wood as he approached the microphone. A smile showed under his curled mustache; his goatee projected forward as though challenging the world. But despite his seeming coolness, Bardoni was fu-

rious. Of all the lousy intros! He'd have to bandy a few words with that M.C., that was all there was to it.

His smile became almost a sneer, as he bowed too low to the audience, doffed his hat, and said, "My name is Bardoni. I will now pause for a moment while you turn to each other and ask, 'Who's he?' I shall endeavor by the aid of my skill in legerdemain to refute, to set at nought all the laws of a well ordered universe . . ."

When he said this, he deliberately pitched his voice low, made it orotund, so that the audience would know he was kidding. The day was long past when magic could be presented seriously. He still bore scars from the period when he had attempted that! No, the thing to do was kid it, much as he hated to.

Rapping his cane on the base of the microphone, he said, "One more whispered word out of madam, and I shall turn you into a rabbit!"

The lady, if that was the correct word, giggled nervously.

Bardoni said, "Behold, a reasonably priced miracle!"

The cane vanished from his hand and in its place he now held a foulard. Showing both sides of the foulard, he said, "And now let's have a Welsh

rabbit!" Reaching into the folds of the garishly colored silk he produced a shining chromium pan. From it leaped flames that threatened to singe his goatee. Placing the fire bowl on his black velvet covered table, he doffed his topper, closed it and popped it open, thus demonstrating its emptiness and, holding it in his left hand, he wove his right fingers in a curious pattern over the hat.

Suddenly two white ears appeared. Reaching into the hat he pulled the rabbit up into view, holding it by the nape of the neck, not by the ears, as cartoonists always pictured a magician doing. Lift it by the ears, he thought irritably, do that often enough and you'd kill the little animal.

As always the women in the audience oo-ed and ah-ed when he produced the little furry white animal. Its angry red eyes surveyed the crowd and Bardoni said in an undertone, "Take it easy Sylvester, I know they're just a bunch of crumbs, and they don't appreciate us, but your work will be over in a second."

The flames in the pan he had just plucked from the fold of the silk were dying down. Just as they flickered out, he dropped the rabbit into the shining pan, and placed a cover over it.

He had the audience's atten-

tion now, and therefore did not bother to speak. Instead he showed the inside of the cover, and then dropped it into the pan where the rabbit was sitting irritably nibbling its front feet.

Instantaneously—that is, as soon as he had lowered the cover—he lifted it again, and tossed it to one side. Lifting the pan, he said, "On second thought a Welsh rabbit is a little messy . . . perhaps you'd prefer . . . kisses . . ." Thrusting his hand into the pan, he began to pluck out handfuls of candy kisses which he threw to the ladies in the audience. But for the candy, the pan was empty.

A drunken woman at the ring-side said, "I want the cute little bunny . . . bring him back, you big slob!"

Swearing under his breath, he paced towards the woman, gestured in the air in front of her almost oppressively large bosom and seemed to produce a brassiere from the air. She was shocked into silence. Depositing the article of intimate underwear in her lap, he strode back to the microphone, his cape swirling out in large angry curves. Thank God, he thought, he'd figured out that angle as a heckler stopper. Drunken women had formerly been the bane of his existence. Paying no attention to the roars of laughter

that followed the woman as she left her table and ran to the ladies' powder room, he showed his hand empty, back and front, and then said, "Observe if you will that at no time in the course of this present experiment, do my fingers ever leave my hand." As he spread his fingers wide, and then closed them again, he darted his hand forward into a tiny pin spot of light and produced a silver dollar into the bucket. It clanked as it hit the bottom of the container.

"The dream of mankind, come true," he said sonorously. "I pluck silver from the circumambient ether . . ." Then in an aside, he said in a tough punch drunk prize fighter's voice, "Wha'd he say? Duh? Wha'd he say?"

While he meandered around the dance floor, with the pin spot following his hands, he produced what seemed to be an endless flow of coins. They tinkled and rattled as he dropped them from his agile fingers into the champagne bucket.

Finally, as though tiring of the sport, he stepped to the side of a bald headed gentleman at a ringside table and said, "You've heard the expression a nose full of nickels? Watch . . ." As he held the bucket under the man's nose, a noisy silver stream of dollars poured into the container.

The man was nonplussed and was still fondling his nose in puzzled amazement as Bardoni walked back to the microphone and said, in pseudo British tones, "You've been so bully, all of you, through this whole despicable mess, that I'd like to show my appreciation." Holding the bucket high in the air, he tossed its contents out over the audience's heads.

They ducked, expecting a shower of silver dollars. But instead of the heavy coins, confetti rained down around them.

Bowing, Bardoni said, "Most performers wait till they exit and return to give their encore. I'm no fool. I shall now present my first prepared encore."

Lifting his black cape off his shoulders, he swirled it in front of him, displaying the red silk lining. Then, whipping it in an arc, he let it fall from his hands. It parachuted outwards, and downwards; but instead of landing in a heap on the floor, it suddenly showed a form beneath it. Whipping the cape up into the air, and while the orchestra hit a sustained *Ta-daaaaa*, he revealed what the form had been.

It was a girl.

Dressed in a female version of his own costume, in a cut-away jacket, white tie, white vest, and long black opera length hose, she rose to a standing po-

sition, and as the audience reacted with an ooooh of surprise, Bardoni stepped backwards out of the spotlight and let his assistant go into her dance.

Much as he loathed relinquishing the center of the floor, even for a moment, he had found that people needed a break from straight magic; he had found that they soon became bludgeoned into an acceptance of what he did, and that it was to his advantage to have a change of pace.

With the spotlight on his assistant, he was able to count the house. Not too bad, for a Friday night before Lent. Not bad at all. Then he watched Judy as she went into the series of spins that was always guaranteed to garner her more applause than any of his most difficult feats of magic.

Bowing to the sound of many palms beating on each other, she stepped back with a graceful gesture and turned the spotlight back to Bardoni.

Adjusting his tie, he said, "Now for my second prepared encore, I shall endeavor to present one of the most baffling illusions ever seen by the human eye."

Two men wheeled the box out into the center of the floor, and Judy hopped into it. Her head projected out of one end, her

feet the other. He closed the top on the box, and bent over and said, "Don't forget the cue."

Then he said, "If I may have the assistance of the leader of this noble band . . . you know his famous slogan, of course, 'Swing and sweat with Davy Harnet.'" That got a giggle, as the bandleader joined Bardoni.

Davy asked, "What can I do for you, Bardoni?"

"As if you didn't know." Bardoni picked up one end of the two-man saw and waited while Davy got hold of the other. They then proceeded to saw the box containing Judy in half.

The saw rasped at the wood, the sharp teeth came down closer and closer to where the audience knew that the girl's stomach must be, as Bardoni said under his breath . . . "Now!"

Judy's scream, as always, electrified the audience, just for a second, and then they laughed as the saw cut deeper and deeper. The metal was through the wood now, and Bardoni shoved two metal plates down into the section where seemingly the girl's body had been cut in two.

With the metal plates in place, he then swung the box around, and as Judy's hair fanned out, and she smiled gaily at the audience, Davy tickled her feet in

the other half of the box, making her wiggle them. Bardoni said, "Silence please . . . the slightest sound may be instantly fatal to the Princess Ayesha . . ."

Sure it was corny; he'd be the first to admit it; but it did help sustain the tension while he swung his half of the box back into place, ripped out the metal plates, dropped them resoundingly to the floor, and then, ripping the top off the box, had Judy pop out, all in one piece.

A deep bow, a curtsy from Judy, and, as the band leader led the applause, the audience took over, and Bardoni was able to make his exit to a good hand.

As he waited to see if there would be enough applause for a return bow, the head waiter said, "Here's a note for you, Bardoni."

A little irritated, Bardoni crumpled it in his hand, and with ear cocked, he waited, milking the applause as long as he dared. Then, grabbing Judy's hand, he stepped back into the spotlight and they took a bow together.

Holding his hand up for silence, he pretended to gasp for breath, and then said, "I was almost up to my dressing room when the sound of the applause drew me back . . . like a magnet." He took the curse off the haminess of the statement by

grinning like a young Mephistopheles. Then plucking his white silk handkerchief from his breast pocket, he whipped it on itself till it was snakelike in shape. Holding it by one end in one hand, he gestured at it with the other. Slowly, very slowly, the dangling end of the silk rose, formed into a knot, and then just as slowly disentangled itself.

As the silk went through its maneuver as though possessed of some kind of uncanny life of its own, he and Judy were walking off stage towards the exit.

As they got to the right side of the dance floor and there was just another foot to go, the silk suddenly fell limp again. Bardoni rolled it into a ball between his palms and then threw his hands up and outward.

The silk vanished and he took another bow, and made his exit.

This time the applause was just a mild patter.

As he and Judy went upstairs to the dressing rooms and the band picked up their cue and began to play a mambo, he said, "We've got to get a better walk off, honey. I don't care what anyone says, that's a lousy ending for the act."

She patted his shoulder and said, "I think the act went very well tonight, Bardoni. Take it

easy. Don't always be trying to top yourself."

"Yeah," he said, his tone heavy, as he slumped into the rickety chair in front of his dressing room mirror and began to rip the crepe hair goatee off his chin. "Relax, take it easy . . . why, do you know that when Houdini was my age, he was making five grand a week and that was back in the twenties when a dollar was a dollar!"

"Times change," she said. "You've got to resign yourself to that. Magic just isn't the draw that it used to be."

"But it could be," Bardoni said angrily. This was an old argument and the words came without thought. He was wiping the sun-tan make-up off his face. Without the goatee and without the artificial points on his eyebrows, it could be seen that he was about thirty and but for the exaggerated widow's peak of his jet black hair, and the bushiness of his hair at his temples, he might have been a bond salesman, or a dentist just beginning to practice. "Oh, brother, it could be. It just needs some new gimmick! After all, as long as Houdini just did magic, he was a slob working carnies, but as soon as he thought of escapes, or getting out of strait-jackets, and milk cans and prisons, then there was

no holding him back. If I could only think of an angle."

His face clean, he began to take off his tail coat. He stopped with the coat half off and half on and said, "You want to go out for late lunch with me?"

She was at the door now, and he was pleasantly aware of her trim figure, and her straight handsome legs in their long stockings. Her pretty face went blank, and she said, "Gee, I'm sorry, Bardoni, but I got a date. Y'know that cute sax player in the band? Well, he asked me out. Let me have a rain check, huh?"

"Sure, sure." Bardoni went back to changing into his street clothes. He was about to hang up his working pants when he remembered the note he'd been handed by the headwaiter.

Probably some fumble-fingered, ham-headed amateur magician who wanted to buy him a drink and then bore him stiff with some junk about how Bardoni could improve his act if he'd only listen to the priceless words of wisdom that the amateur was willing to exchange for the secret of just how that rabbit change was worked . . .

Unwrinkling the card, he eyed it.

"Count Saint Germain." Engraved too. He damn near cut his thumb, the engraving was

raised so high. Count Saint Germain? What kind of fiddle-faddle was this? He was a charlatan of the seventeenth century, a faker like Cagliostro. As a matter of fact, Cagliostro had always maintained that it was the Count from whom he'd learned everything he knew.

Bardoni was interested.

If this fellow was a professional, how come he'd never heard of him?

It was a lot drunker in the joint, Bardoni saw as he re-entered the room. Now that the last show was over, the audience had to drink faster unless they wanted to leave at closing time cold sober, and that Bardoni knew was the last thing they wanted.

Looking around, he spotted the headwaiter. "Where's the guy who sent me the card?"

He needn't have asked, for as soon as the Count was pointed out, Bardoni realized he would have spotted him. At twenty paces the Count looked about thirty-five, handsome, well set up, straight-backed and elegant. But as Bardoni wove his way through the narrow aisle that separated the tables, each step he took seemed to age the Count.

Count Saint Germain, he was thinking. That was the one who "cured" Louis the Four-

teenth's diamond. If it hadn't had a flaw in it the stone would have been worth a quarter of a million dollars . . . and then Le Comte de Saint Germain took it, did something to it, and returned it to the Golden King with his compliments. The flaw in the diamond was gone, and the grateful king was nonplussed when Le Comte would take no reward from him.

What a bit of publicity, Bardoni thought. Those old-timers knew how to do it up brown.

By then he was only five feet from the man who had sent the card. Now the man looked about sixty. A fine network of wrinkles had become visible.

And now that Bardoni was this close, and the man who called himself Count Saint Germain was rising and bowing, Bardoni could see that the man's dress clothes were a little peculiar. He was wearing tails, but they were not cut like any Bardoni had ever seen. Tiny ruffles cascaded down the Count's shirt front, and his cuffs seemed to be ruffled too.

Two ornate rings ornamented his womanishly soft, womanishly white hands. His tie was soft and tied in a strange way. Bardoni extended his hand and said, "You wished to see me?"

"Ah, yes, indeed I did." There was a heaviness to the man's

voice, a sort of constriction, as though the words came with some difficulty.

But as soft and effeminate as his hands looked, his handshake was firm and hearty. He gestured for Bardoni to be seated. There was a champagne bucket at the table, and at a word from the Count, the waiter poured some for Bardoni.

There was something peculiar about the Count's eyes, Bardoni realized, and he was trying to figure out what it was, when the Count lifted his glass in a toast.

"May you live for a thousand years," the Count said in those peculiar tones, and then paused as Bardoni picked up his glass, before going on. "And may I live forever."

Draining his glass off at a gulp, Bardoni suddenly saw what it was about the Count's eyes that he had found so distressing. The man had nictitating eyelids . . . a third eyelid, transparent, and capable of going over his eyeballs independently of his regular lids. It was quite disturbing, for as far as Bardoni knew, only birds possessed such an attribute.

"What can I do for you, sir?" Bardoni asked, as he picked up the wine bottle himself, not waiting for the waiter, and poured himself some more. He

had a feeling he was going to need something to buck him up.

"Mmmm . . . I do not think you can do quite as much for me as I can do for you."

The words were stressed oddly, but Bardoni could not determine what accent the man had, if it was an accent. It sounded almost like a person who had not spoken for a long, very long time. As though the man's vocal cords were a little rusty with disuse.

"You can have 'no idea . . .'" the Count said, and now that he was this close, Bardoni decided that the Count was older than anyone he had ever seen before. The network of wrinkles was so all-encompassing that the wrinkles had wrinkles. And yet the man was not feeble. Far from it, that handshake . . . The Count went on, ". . . No idea at all, how strange it is to come back here after a long absence."

"Back to America, to New York?" Bardoni asked.

"Ummm." The Count pressed his fingertips together and the heavy rings caught and reflected back the lights, sparkling and bright. "In a manner of speaking. No, I really meant it is strange to come back to your world."

Rich the man might be, old—incapably old—he must be, but nutty as the proverbial fruit

cake, Bardoni decided. Then, curiosity overrode his feeling of revulsion at the man's obvious insanity and Bardoni asked, "Been away long?"

"Yes, long in your terms. Roughly two centuries."

Bardoni stared at the man's long aquiline nose, his deep set eyes with that disconcerting extra lid, the hair which must be a wig, for surely no man as old as this had ever retained a full head of hair, at the man's deep sunken cheeks, and scar-thin lips. Just what in hell was this old boy up to?

"That's quite awhile to be away," Bardoni said gently as he refilled his glass. Might as well get plastered. He wasn't going to believe any of this tomorrow anyway.

Whatever was on the old bird's mind was a long time in coming to the surface. Four bottles later, Bardoni, who had drunk most of the champagne, left the club with his arm around the Count's shoulders.

Holding himself very erect, and thinking, "No sense in letting the boss see I'm loaded," he sallied forth into the night with his new bosom buddy.

"Where'll we go, old pal, old sock?" Bardoni asked.

"The night is young," the Count answered, which was a lie, since it was after four

o'clock in the morning. "Why do we not repair to your rooms?"

"Good idea. A bird can't fly on one wing, and I got a bottle home."

Staggering into a cab, Bardoni attempted to talk the Count into taking the tenor in a spirited rendition of *Little Red Wing*, but the Count was obdurate, and Bardoni had to sing alone.

The Count seemed pleased by Bardoni's hotel suite, and most pleased when Bardoni introduced him to Sylvester's lady friend, Abigail. The rabbit sat perkily in its pen, its red eyes alert, as the Count crooned to it, and petted it between its ears where all rabbits like to be scratched.

Around Bardoni's rooms were scattered the paraphernalia of a dozen acts that he had tried before working out the one he now used. In one corner was an ornately painted box with three doors on it. It was a little larger than life size and when the Count had ceased petting Abigail, he said, "That box, sir, what is it used for?"

Considering it blurrily, Bardoni said, "Oh, that . . . girl without a middle."

"Do I understand that you place your so charming assistant in that box, then seem to demonstrate that there is no middle section to her?"

"Thass righ'. Good trick. But old hat now. Used to throw knives through the middle, prove Judy had no belly."

"Charming. Charming."

Bardoni knocked a production box off a sofa and said, "Sid-down, this freedom house. Kick off your shoes, make yourself homely."

Opening a bottle, Bardoni poured his guest a short drink, and himself a man-sized gulp of bourbon.

"I think I have had enough, thank you." The Count sat back on a chair that had two mirrors set between its four legs. The reflections made the Count look as many legged as a centipede, which Bardoni found, in his present state, to be hilarious.

Polishing off the drink, Bardoni asked, "And now, what can I do for you, Count?"

The sight of the man's ancient visage, its many wrinkles working excitedly as he blocked out a story that Bardoni felt at the moment was one of the most fantastic things he had ever heard, was the last thing Bardoni remembered.

II

The noon sun was full in Bardoni's eyes when he finally awoke. Not daring to move a muscle, he lay perfectly still.

The room was swirling gently. The bed was possessed of an independent life of its own, a gentle vertiginous flow, that Bardoni feared would have drastic results.

What in the world had possessed him to get sozzled? That wasn't like him. He was, at best, a sociable drinker, but far from a lush. He couldn't remember the last time he had been fully drunk.

He had really tied one on, he decided as, risking all, he slowly lifted his balloon-sized head. Lifting his hand to his aching forehead, he saw a ring on his middle finger. Ancient, ornate, with a preposterous red stone in it. He knew he had seen the ring before, but at the moment he could not remember where, or why, or what the ring meant.

Water.

If he didn't have a drink of water, he'd die. That was one sure thing in an unsure world.

Staggering to the bathroom, he stared at his red-rimmed eyes. They reminded him that Abigail must be starving. He always fed her first thing when he got up. But first, water. Draining four glasses, he suddenly had to hold onto the basin for support. Fool! Dolt! Imbecile! Water on top of a champagne drunk! He was plastered again.

Head reeling, a silly smile plastered on his face, he made his way out of the bathroom and to Abigail. Patting her, he went to the kitchen and grabbed a handful of carrots and some lettuce. Dropping them down to her, he fell into a chair and tried to remember the events of the previous evening. As he sat in drunken thought, he found himself rotating the ring on his finger. A dry, rusty voice seemed to say in his ear the words that he vaguely remembered having heard before: "As you value your life, do not remove this ring! Remember, no matter what the occasion, no matter what the temptation, if you remove the ring, you die!" That was pretty ridiculous, he decided, looking at the ring, but he suddenly found that he had no great desire to take it off his finger.

Putting it completely out of his mind, he brought his eyes to bear on the clock. One on the button, the time he had a weekly appointment at the magic shop to meet his confreres and bitch about conditions, discuss new tricks, variations on old ones, and in general, carry on as all magicians did when they weren't performing.

Maybe about two gallons of black coffee would do it. He did not feel up to puttering around

in the kitchen, so by a great display of manly will power he managed to force his body into clothes.

Reaching for the doorknob brought the ring back to his attention again. He turned to see that Abigail was all taken care of, and just as he opened the door, he said, "You were here, you heard what went on last night, and you weren't drunk. You'd remember the whole thing. If you rabbits could only talk . . ."

Abigail said slowly, distinctly, and with much wrinkling of her tiny pink nose, "That's just silly. Rabbits can't talk."

Out on the street, in front of his apartment hotel, Bardoni found himself talking to himself. "You're drunk, you jerk, that's all. What's the matter with you? Got a hole in your head? Rabbits can't talk, just as Abigail said." But that led into a trap because she had talked and very plainly too.

The afternoon sun felt good on his addled brain. Coffee, That was of the essence. Staggering into the coffee pot on the ground floor of his hotel he sat perfectly still, deliberately trying not to think until he had had four cups of coffee. Then reaching out into the air, he absent-mindedly plucked a lighted ciga-

rette from nowhere, making an old lady at the next table do a double take, which he was completely unaware of. Puffing on the cigarette he decided that except for the evidence of the ring he wore, he would rather like to doubt the existence of a certain old gentleman with a rusty voice.

The coffee helped as it generally did, and by two o'clock he was meandering slowly along Forty-second Street, making his way to the magic shop. He paused in front of the music store that was mid-way in the block between Sixth Avenue and Seventh and eyed the instruments on display. A shining grand piano reflected back a slightly distorted view of his face. His eyes were still bleary looking, but aside from that he looked up to snuff, he decided.

Entering 120, he ambled to the elevator, said hello to the starter, and as the bent old man expected, he reached out and plucked a silver dollar from the starter's uniform. But his heart wasn't in it; he didn't bother to vanish it the way he usually did because he loved to see the old boy's eyes pop. Instead he did the steeplechase, which is an involved and spectacular looking maneuver, in which the coin rotates along the back of the fingers of the hand, around the

palm and then again rolls across the backs of the fingers.

The starter said, "Take Mr. Bardoni right up to the twelfth floor, Jack."

The elevator operator grinned hello, and Bardoni, feeling a little better, plucked a lit cigarette from his ear, and rode up to his floor, chatting amiably with the operator about baseball, which was in bad shape for a Brooklyn rooter like the operator.

At the twelfth floor, Bardoni did not even bother to read the sign that said *Louis Tannen, Magic Supplies*. Instead he walked to his left and entered his home-away-from-home. They were all there. Jay Marshall, Rickie Dunn, Jack Miller, looking like an English professor, with his pince nez dangling from a black ribbon, Dai Vernon off in a corner, the ever-present cigarette dangling from the side of his mouth, the omnipresent deck of playing cards held in his deft hands, his man-of-distinction look as much his trade mark as ever, from his handsome face to his pewter-like gray hair that made a helmet for his well shaped head.

With his back to the glass counter, Norman Jensen was demonstrating something that Bardoni could not see, but it must have been funny, for the

group around him, from Bill Simon to Dr. Braude, all went off into a roar of guffaws.

They all turned and said hello as Bardoni bowed in the doorway.

Behind the counter, Tannen's flaming red hair beckoned Bardoni. "C'mere, I wanna show you a new one just came in from England. Darnedest thing you ever saw! An idea of Peter Warlock's!"

Pushing through the crowd, shaking hands, Bardoni made his way towards the counter. To one side of Tannen, Herpick, the trick demonstrator who looked more like Donald O'Conner than O'Conner did, was doing something that puzzled Bardoni.

He seemed about three feet taller than usual.

Must be standing on something back of the counter, Bardoni decided.

All in all it was the usual Saturday afternoon crowd in any magic store in any big city all over the country. This was where magicians and magic fans met, exchanged gossip, tricks, and tried their damndest to fool each other, for there is no more delightful sensation to a magician than to fool a brother magician. Fooling a layman is pretty much like shooting fish in a barrel. No sport at all. But to fool a brother adept,

ah, Bardoni thought, that was a real kick.

Before he could get to Tannen however, he got close enough to the counter so that he could see that Herpick was not standing on anything. Instead, his feet were firmly planted in mid-air. He was not being a show off about it. Far from it. He was merely standing three feet off the ground as though it was perfectly normal to do so.

"What's the gaff?" Bardoni asked feeling that he was being made a sucker of. "A gooseneck behind you?"

"You kidding?" Herpick's bland face was even blander than usual. "What's new about this? I'm just levitating, like any third class adept."

Okay, okay, Bardoni thought, so he'd been fooled, but did Herpick have to keep up the pretense?

Then he looked down into the long glass counter where ordinarily the shelves were jammed with every kind of close-up gimmick from thumb tips to finger choppers, from vanishing cigars to appearing wands, from color changing silks to decks of cards that worked themselves automatically with no need for any kind of finger flinging skill, and what Bardoni saw in the counter, instead, made his stom-

ach lurch and his mind flee from reality.

No shiny chromium gimmicks. No fake fingers. No silks that could be compressed up into almost no space at all.

No gadgets of any kind.

Instead the counter was filled with phials, alembics and powders in tiny containers like ornate snuff boxes. That was strange but might have been just a new display. It was the little neatly lettered cards next to the objects that made Bardoni doubt his own sanity.

Instead of saying, as the cards generally did, *Miniature Die Box, A Howl, Yours for only \$2.50*, the signs read, unless his eyes were lying, *Three drops of Dragon's Blood. Best grade, donated by Oliver J. Dragon*. Another smaller card said with a certain simple dignity, *Witchbane*. Rubbing his knuckles in his red-rimmed eyes, Bardoni shook his head, tried to clear it. That little sign in front of the big glass alembic—it still read, as it had a moment ago, *Unicorn horn. Dehydrated. Ready at a moment's notice, just add three drops of virgin's blood and you're all set*.

There were knucklebones, which had a tag saying, *You've cast the rest, now cast the best*, and next to them a box perhaps thirty-six inches long.

Lettered on it was, *Why spend more? Buy the conjuror's kit. We've done the work, you have the fun*.

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Poisoned entrails (Wow!)
Swelter'd venom (No one, but no one else has this)
Fenny snake fillet (try ours)
Root of hemlock (the bitterest)
Gall of goat (And what gall!)
Eye of Newt (A real beaut!)
Toe of frog (Best by test)
Wool of bat (Grade A)
Tongue of dog (Pedigreed)
Adder's fork (A delight)
Blind worm's sting (Hard to get)
Lizzard's leg (2, very fragile)
Howlet's wing (Unique)
Scale of dragon (Superior grade)
Tooth of wolf (With cavity)

And many more! Why waste time with substitutes when for a measly hundred and fifty dollars, you can have the best?

Recommended by the Great Bardoni who used this kit himself!

That did it.

If there was one thing that Bardoni was still sure of, it was that he had never in his life recommended a kit containing any of these oddments. Nor had

he ever used one. Nor could he, for he hadn't the slightest idea what conceivable use any magician could possibly have for a single one of the ingredients that he was supposed to be so enthusiastic about.

That this might be a vast practical joke seemed improbable, but magicians as a breed are fond of hoaxes . . . Bardoni hoped against hope that he was being made the butt of a complicated joke. To one side, on the book-lined shelves, he saw two text books on magic which he always kept near him at home. No matter how fantastic the joke might be, he thought, taking down the two books, looking at their jackets, their titles, *Magic as a Hobby* and *Classic Secrets of Magic* no one would have, or could have re-set the type in the books just for a gag.

Opening the familiar looking books, he riffled through the pages. Although the dust wrappers were identical with those he owned, the contents, he saw, his head whirling, were completely different. Here were no illustrations on how to double lift a card, or perform the pass with a deck of cards. Instead, he saw diagrams, symbols, pentagrams and other cabalistic diagrams, which meant less than nothing to him.

It was not a joke, practical or impractical.

Slowly, his brain numbed, and feeling about as useful as a glass of calf's liver, he returned the books to the shelves. Meanwhile, behind the counter, Jimmy Herpick was now lying on his side in the air. Perhaps four feet off the ground, he lazed there as he chatted amiably with a young magician.

It was too much, Bardoni thought. Much too much. But Lou Tannen was one of his best friends, even in a nightmare like this. Going behind the counter, he grabbed the red-headed man by the elbow and pulled him into the back of the store. Even there everything was as it should be. Dick Piser was busy at work wrapping parcels, preparing them for mailing, and in Lou's office his secretary was just as busy as ever, billing and doing bookkeeping.

Lou asked, "What's up, Bardoni? You look sick or scared." His red hair flaming in the afternoon sun, Bardoni's friend seemed quite concerned.

Bardoni said, "Lou, you've known me a long time."

"Ever since you changed your name from Tommy Gardner to the Great Bardoni." The man chuckled. "But what's up?"

Nervously, Bardoni sat and turned the curious antique ring

around and around on the middle finger of his right hand. "I think I've gone nuts, Lou."

"Take it easy. Tell me about it." The red-headed business man turned to his secretary and said, "Leila, tell the boys out front to carry on. I'm not to be disturbed."

Bardoni got to his feet and looked out the office window down onto the unchanged street below. As usual in New York, the streets were black with people, the cars were jammed together nose to fender. All around Bardoni, all seemed as usual. And yet . . . and yet . . . Aloud he said, "I want to test something, Lou. Give me a deck of cards."

Reaching into a desk drawer, the red-head threw a deck to Bardoni.

Bardoni riffled them, fanned them and extended the fanned pack to have the red-head select a card at random. Once it had been selected and returned to the pack, Bardoni shuffled the pack, and said, "What card did you select, Lou?"

Puzzled, the man said, "The three of hearts. Why?"

"Watch," Bardoni said, and then proceeded to seem to demonstrate that all the cards in the deck had turned into threes of hearts.

His heart sank when he saw

the expression of complete befuddlement cross over his friend's face. Bardoni asked, "Any idea how I did that, Lou?"

"Good grief, no! You've stumbled on something completely new, Bardoni! When you're tired of using that, may I put it on the market?"

"Lou," Bardoni said tiredly, the little hairs on the back of his neck raising with fear of the unknown. "Yesterday or the day before if I had done that trick for you, you would have laughed at me. Yesterday any ten-year-old boy could have done the same trick. What's happened? How can Jimmy float in mid-air, and what's all that hocus-pocus with bat's blood, and newt's eyes?"

Reaching out his hand, the red-head touched Bardoni's forehead. He said, "You don't seem to be feverish. Look, Tommy, what's wrong with you? How would our magic work if we did not use magical ingredients? As for Jimmy's floating in mid-air, you learned that when you were in your teens. You stopped doing it in your act, because it got kicked around so. You said only amateurs were using it now." Then the red-head pointed to the pack of cards and said, "But that card trick, what's the magic formu-

la? Can you tell me? I'd love to sell it."

Shaking his head to try and chase away the cobwebs that seemed to be gathering there, Bardoni tried a wild stab in the dark. He asked, "Lou, do you know a man named the Count Saint Germain?"

Instantly his read-headed friend leaped to his feet, ran to the office door and slammed it shut. Then, his forefinger pressed to his lips, he came close to Bardoni and whispered, "Shhh . . . don't you know the police are investigating his disappearance?"

Bardoni put his hands to his aching head and tried to think. Lou Tannen pointed an excited finger at the ring on Bardoni's hand and said, "Tommy! Where did you get that ring?"

"Saint Germain gave it to me!" Bardoni lowered his hands and looked at the ring.

"Get rid of it, throw it away, take it off this instant! The police think that he met with foul play. I've seen him wearing that ring and if I remember it, then so will a lot of other people!"

Responding instinctively to the urgency of his friend's voice, Bardoni put his left fingers around the ring and began to pull it off his finger. Instantly he seemed to hear, deep inside his brain, that rusty voice say-

ing, "If you remove the ring, you die . . ."

Jamming his hands into his pockets, Bardoni said, "I can't take it off Lou. I can't!"

Through the office door came an official voice, ponderous and heavy. "Open this door. Open up in the name of the law!"

Tannen said, "The cops! I suppose it was inevitable that they check on the Count Saint Germain in all the magic shops!"

"What'll I do?" In a panicky state that deprived him of all intelligence, Bardoni looked wildly around him. The Count gone, the police after his "killer" and he, Bardoni, stuck with a ring that had belonged to the Count, and that he could not remove from his finger . . . What could he conceivably do?

Tannen looked from the door, which was vibrating under the pounding that it was getting, to Bardoni. "Quick, the fire stairs."

Pushing Bardoni towards a back door, Tannen said, "If you're really as confused as you say, go to the Coven, ask the wizard there what you can do. He may recommend a psychiatrist, or perhaps you are under a spell. In either case, the wizard will be able to tell you what to do!"

By that time, Tannen had almost bodily pushed Bardoni out the door. Aloud he yelled, "I'm

coming, you don't have to knock my door down."

Bardoni asked hurriedly, "But where? How'll I find the Coven?"

"You *are* in a bad way!" Quick concern showed on Tannen's face. "If you've forgotten that, what else must you have forgotten? But . . . no time for that. Hurry. The Coven is at Seventieth Street and West End Avenue . . . the number is . . ." and he whispered the address as Bardoni slipped out the door and began to run down the stairs.

Behind him Bardoni could hear his friend locking the fire door.

Then that was all he could hear.

Hoping against hope that his friend would be able to stall the cops a little while, Bardoni ran down the stairs faster than he had ever run in his whole life.

III

Gasping for breath, Bardoni lurked just inside the door down on the street level. If the cops had staked out the area he was a dead duck. But a hurried look showed no sign of the men in blue. It must just have been a check-up that the police were on; they had no evidence in particular; their thinking, Bardoni thought, must simply be that if

a magician disappeared, it was a good idea to check up on other magicians.

Hailing a cab, he threw himself into it, and while the car drove at a snail's pace through the Broadway traffic, he looked around for any other signs of insanity that might be a clue as to what was wrong with him. But every shop was where he remembered it being, every theatre was where it should be, and they were all showing movies that he remembered being on display. This was the world as he knew it. All except for the little area of magic and magicians.

Or in some tiny spot in his brain, Bardoni realized, where something seemed to have snapped.

The cab finally got to Eleventh Avenue and then it made a little better time. Sailing up the avenue he saw that it changed to West End Avenue just as it should, at Fifty-seventh Street. In the Hudson River he could see the normal amount of pleasure boats, tugs, and scows . . . It was a completely ordinary Saturday afternoon to all intents and purposes.

It wasn't until the cab drove into Seventieth Street that Bardoni realized that the address should have rung a bell. He knew the house he was going

to; he'd been there often. Every Friday night most of the magicians in town dropped in and visited with the man who lived there. Bardoni had been there often. The man published a trade paper for magicians called the *Phoenix*.

Paying the cab, he went slowly up the four brown stone steps. On the mail box in the hall, he saw as usual, the man's name on the letter box, and under it, as always, a neatly lettered sign that read, *The Phoenix*. But... under that, equally neatly lettered was something that Bardoni knew he had never seen before: *Covens every Friday night*.

Ringling the bell, he waited.

The man who answered, he knew should be about five feet nine inches tall, heavy set, wearing tortoise shell rimmed glasses, and a drooping mustache that was oddly at variance with his short, crew cropped hair.

Bardoni heard the shrill yapping of the man's French poodle, just as he had every Friday night in the past when he had come to visit, to gossip, and swap tricks . . .

The door opened and, also as usual, the man he had come to see was dressed in a T-shirt and a pair of wildly patterned shorts. Nothing had changed. The man

said, "Bardoni! Long time no see. Welcome may you be."

Bowing satirically, the man ushered Bardoni into a cluttered room where two desks were piled high with manuscripts, and the walls were lined with books.

Bardoni dropped his body wearily into one of the two sagging overstuffed chairs that room boasted and said, "You've got to help me."

"Sure," the man said, the epicanthic fold over his eyes making them look Oriental, and reminding Bardoni a little unpleasantly of the nictitating eyelids that the Count Saint Germain possessed. "What can I do for you?"

The French poodle had stopped yapping and was ensconced on the man's lap. He said, "Just stay there, that way, Dedee." Then he turned his attention back to Bardoni and said, "Man, you're in bad shape, what's with you?"

Bardoni recited the part of his travail that he thought was relevant.

The man crossed his legs under him, Buddha-wise, and considered Bardoni. "So the Count has vanished again, huh? It was about time." Reaching up behind him he took down a book. Opening it almost at random he read: "Shortly after Le Comte de Saint Germain had taught,

Cagliostro all that Balsamo ever knew, and directly after he had 'cured' the Sun King's diamond, le Comte once more vanished off the face of the earth, until just before the Revolution. He vanished when the Terror was at its height. This is the last authenticated appearance that is recorded until the time of the Citizen King, 1866, when he was seen in and around Paris. In 1870, he once more vanished, leaving behind him garbled tales of having lived for thousands of years, of having been alive in Caesar's time, or knowing the secret of the Philosopher's stone, and myriad other wonders.

"In 1912, he was seen and known to have been in Russia. Whether as Rasputin always claimed, the mad monk was actually a pupil of Le Comte's is not known for a certainty. He vanished just before the Revolution and there is no record of his having been seen until 1928 when he appeared in New York City, in the United States of America . . ."

"This was written by an Englishman," the man interpolated and then continued reading: "On the Saturday after Black Friday on the stock market in 1929, Le Comte once more disappeared off the face of the earth.

"Well documented evidence seems to prove that Hitler's court astrologer was one of his pupils and that Le Comte was often a visitor at Berchtesgarden. He was last seen in Germany just before the fall of Berlin. Later he was seen in America at Los Alamos, and White Sands, and there are reports that he showed up at Eniwetok.

"There is another long hiatus and then, he re-appeared most recently in New York City, where, at last reports, he still resides."

The man with the drooping mustache said, "So you see, it was just about time for him to vanish again."

Bardoni said thoughtfully, "He appears, there is sudden strife, revolution, war, and economic depression, and then just as disaster strikes, he departs. Nice fellow."

"Many occultists have made that point," the pudgy man said, rubbing his crew cut hair like a brush. "They feel that he is responsible for everything from the atom bomb to the cold war."

"But why would he involve me in his Machiavellian plans, and what has happened to me? And why does my magic seem to have changed over night from legerdemain and sleight of hand

to black magic, potions and spells?"

"As for that, I fear I don't understand what you mean by sleight of hand or that other term."

This was from a man that Bardoni knew published a bi-weekly trade paper devoted to sleights and subtleties!

"What can I do? Lou seemed to think you'd be able to help me."

The man pulled at one straggling end of his mustache and said, "As to that, it's highly irregular and all that sort of thing, but I *could* call a Coven for tonight and see if Dedee, my familiar, can help you at all."

So he was to pin his hopes on an irascible, highly strung French poodle bitch, Bardoni thought disconsolately. A fine state of affairs, but as long as his host was willing to laugh at the thought of the police coming here, the apartment did serve as a sanctuary, and that was all Bardoni wanted at the moment—a chance to sit still and think things out.

It took roughly four lifetimes for the day to drag its weary way into nightfall, and then another ten or twelve centuries before all the members of the Coven arrived. They were all friends of Bardoni's and under

other circumstances, and if he could have talked his kind of magic to them, he would have had a fine time.

But their light chit chat, about the best spell to employ when making oneself invisible, and what possible twists could be devised in order to better exploit levitation, left him cold.

His host had his eyes on the clock, and as midnight approached he said, "Better stop drinking now, gents, it's almost time."

The magicians put their highballs away and, sitting around a rather rickety bridge table, their little fingers interlocked, they waited while the host kept track of the time.

Bardoni felt really left out of it. He was sitting to one side of the circle of men, and he was smoking so much that his lungs were aching and his mouth felt as if an owl had been living in it for a couple of weeks.

Dedee, the poodle, sat quietly in the center of the table.

Their host yelled out to his wife, "Douse the lights, Bunny, it's time." And then they were all in a velvet blackness that slowly became more and more oppressive.

These men, his friends, who had just been sitting around chatting, telling dirty jokes, and drinking, were now stran-

gers, unseen members of a secret conclave.

Their voices rose high in a chant that was completely unintelligible to Bardoni. It was strangely accented and dissonant, like Shoenberg's music, atonal, almost as if it were based on the twelve tone scale.

The darkness pressed on Bardoni's eyeballs.

The host said, "The Coven is ready."

The center of the table—an ordinary bridge table, Bardoni thought uneasily, off which he had eaten dinner earlier—now had a spot of greenish light emanating from it. The dog seemed to have vanished.

The light faded, flickered, and then Bardoni gasped, as he saw the green luminescence coalesce and become a man's face.

But no, he was wrong. This visage had never, dead or alive, belonged to any member of the human race. In the first place, the fangs that projected from the corners of the thing's mouth were as inconvenient as a sabretooth tiger's. And the blank sockets where eyes might have been were covered with scales. In the center of the forehead, a round, unpleasant, jelly-like eye, seemed to look in all directions at once.

The stuff that covered the thing's head had never been de-

signed as hair. Bardoni was sure of that. It had an independent life of its own, which made him feel queasy. And the two bone-like objects that struck out of its temples had never grown on a human's head. That was for sure.

The host, the leader of the Coven said conversationally, "It's about time you showed up, Alzebaran."

The thing contorted its face into an even more unseemly expression and said, "If I had one, you guys'd give me a pain in the behind. It was a bad day for demons when you slobs found the incantations to make us do as you want us to."

"That's enough of that." The host rapped the demon on the high arched nose which then proceeded to elongate like an elephant's trunk and feel itself with the tip.

It said, "Keep your big hands to yourself, Buster, or you'll slip one of these days . . . and then . . ."

"You just wait till I slip. In the meantime a friend of ours, Bardoni over there, is in trouble, and you'd better tell him what to do or it's no more sacrifices you'll be getting!"

The demon said, "Spit it out, I ain't got all night. I got things to do. Important things. The

Count is busy calling all of us to heel."

There was a long silence. Bardoni thought, the Count, always the Count. But this was at least a lead. The demon, Alzebaran, had been called on by the Count.

The host, "That's very interesting. What does the Count want?"

"Come off it, adept, you know the Count ranks you by about ninety-nine degrees. You better study up before you step in on him!" The demon was contemptuous.

"Then tell Bardoni what he must do to find out what he wants to know."

The green lighted face turned and looked at Bardoni. The single eye rolled and moved around as though capable, if it felt so disposed, of leaving its socket and going where it wanted to.

Something thick and liquid was pouring down its fangs, Bardoni could see, and collecting in a puddle in the middle of the table. A stench like nothing Bardoni's nostrils had ever encountered emanated from the little puddle.

"Make me," the demon said challengingly.

The host sighed heavily, and said, "All right boys all together—one, two, three."

At the count of three the seven men seated in a huddle

around the table began to chant. It was in no language that Bardoni had ever heard before, and the heavy gutturals fell like blows from a whip on the demon's head. The hair on its scalp rose and fell, the skin crawled and it wrinkled its face agonizingly. Finally it said, in broken desperate tones, "Aw right, aw right, awready. You made your point. Now I have to obey you, cut it out."

The voices fell silent.

The single eye began to project outwards from the socket, and Bardoni felt malevolence like a live thing strike out at him.

The demon might be doing what it was doing because it was forced to do so, but it bloody well didn't like doing it. Bardoni wondered how much credence he could place in what the thing was saying under such duress. It said:

"One time three, no fiddle dee dee.

To the museum and you will see

Carnavon's scarab, a petrified tree,

The mouth of Adonis, tee hee hee . . ."

The host said, "I wish you demons didn't all try to be Edgar A. Guest."

Then, much more immediately than it had appeared, the demon head vanished and the poodle leaped off the table, ready to be petted.

"Lights," the host roared, and his wife turned on the electricity, and suddenly the room was like any room, and the people were once more all his friends. But for the pool of viscous fluid in the center of the shabby bridge table, Bardoni would have felt that he had been dreaming.

One of the men at the table took out a handkerchief and began to sop up the liquid. He said, "Mind if I take this? I'm almost out, and I want to try some teleportation in my show tomorrow night."

"Take it with my blessing," the host said. "I've got gallons."

Bardoni asked timorously, "Did that gibberish mean anything?"

"Mean anything?" The host was incredulous; he chewed at his scrubby mustache. "You are in a bad way, Bardoni. Why even a beginning first degree quid nunc would know that you better hustle your bustle up to the Magic Museum and get hold of the scarab and the petrified tree—and by the way, don't let that lousy curator try to palm off that puny little twig he tried

to stick me with; get the whole tree. And when you make obeisance to Adonis, don't forget any of the formula, or, brother, you're in for trouble. Lay people may think that Adonis was just a pretty boy, but he was a mean bastard all the same. Whew . . . some of the ritual to him makes even me sick at my stomach."

"You don't seem to realize I don't know any rituals!" Bardoni almost whimpered. "What's more I don't even know where the Magic Museum is."

The host stood up and said, "As much as I loathe putting pants on, I guess I'll have to take you up there." Taking a small book off the bulging shelves, he said, "Take this with you."

Then hurriedly, dressing, he said, "Don't go 'way boys, I'll teach him the ritual in the cab, drop him off at the museum and be right back. I've got a cute idea on transmutation that I think you'll all like."

Kissing his wife good-bye, and telling her to put the coffee on, he accompanied Bardoni out onto the street.

Bardoni's mind kept heaving sickly. What the hell did he know about Adonis worship, or petrified trees and scarabs? . . . if only he could be back performing his kind of magic, even

in front of the drunkest audience . . .

The man with him said, "We better go to the grocery store first and pick up a black rooster and some of the other things you're gonna need."

IV

The cab drove off into the night and Bardoni was all alone. In a paper sack he had a live black fowl. In his right-hand coat pocket he had a curiously curved knife with the most obscene carvings on it that he had ever seen. In his inner breast pocket, he had a packet of herbs that his host had also given him. His mind was repeating over and over the meaningless words that he had had to memorize in the short taxi ride to the museum.

In any other circumstances, Bardoni would have considered the building in front of him interesting. But the fact that it stood on Fifth Avenue in the Eighties right where he knew the Metropolitan Museum of Art should be was disconcerting, to put it mildly.

Ascending the stairs, muttering the words he had been taught over and over to himself, he suddenly wondered how he was going to get into the museum at one o'clock in the morning!

Rapping on one of the glass panels in the door in front of him, he waited.

It was a long wait, and the guard, when he came, aged and cranky, was not much help. He said, "You magicians! You give me a pain. Why don't you go to bed like other people!"

But finally after much muttering, he opened the door and allowed Bardoni to follow him into the cavernous recesses of the museum.

"Mr. Charlier? The Curator?" Bardoni asked.

"Yeah, yeah, I'll go wake him. A lot you magicians care who you disturb."

Then Bardoni was alone in the darkened room that stretched as far away as he could see through the gloom. Nearest him, a devil mask, primitive in construction, but ghastly to view in that somber darkness, leered down at him. Under it a voodoo drum seemed to sit and wait for a Papa Legba to come and pound it and call out for Damballah to appear.

What little he could discern of the other exhibits made him a little glad that there was as dim light as there was. He had no desire to investigate any more closely.

In the distance he could hear a tap, tap, tap, tap.

His stomach muscles tighten-

ing, he waited, his hands sweaty with fear, to see who or what was approaching.

Some of the tension eased off as he saw a little man, no more than five feet tall, wispy and sparrow-like, coming closer.

Pince-nez on his nose, high forehead gleaming in the vagrant light from a street lamp that came through one of the windows, he asked, "Yes, what is it? Is it very important?"

Bardoni said, "Very."

"Who sent you here?"

Bardoni told him his friend's name.

The curator said, "Oh, that one! Wouldn't you know he'd think of some way to disturb my night's sleep! Between the police being here all day interrogating me, and magicians bothering me at night, I just don't know how I shall ever finish my bibliography of necrophilism. I do wish people would be more considerate. However."

He diddled with his pince-nez, and then said, "Just what do you want?"

Feeling like a complete and utter idiot, Bardoni said, as his friend had told him to, "By the name that is not a name, and that cannot be uttered, I direct you to take me to Carnavon's scarab and the petrified tree."

The man made a face like a prim old maid, and said, "Oh I

say, you are dabbling in dark waters! It's your soul you're risking. Come along, come along."

Through corridors that seemed to stretch out into nightmare lengths, through rooms crowded with curios, past phallic statues that made Bardoni lower his eyes, the fussy little man led the way.

After it seemed that they had walked many city blocks, the little man said, "Do you want me to wait? This is your first stop."

The idea of being alone was more than Bardoni could bear. He said, "Would you mind waiting?"

"Would I mind? As if I could refuse after what you said. Do you think I want to be turned into a warty toad? I'm not that silly."

The curator sat on the lap of a small female idol in the far corner of the room to which he had brought Bardoni. Then, paying absolutely no attention to what Bardoni had to do, he whipped out a notebook and began to scribble in it.

The display case in front of Bardoni was open, unlike any museum case that Bardoni had ever seen. On black velvet reposed a shining, ruby red beetle.

As he had been told to do,

Bardoni picked it up and tried to disregard the way the scarab's beady eyes glared at him. Putting it to his mouth, he said a long series of vocables, the only one of which he had ever heard before being Anubis.

When he had finished the ritual, he waited.

He looked at it.

It looked right back at him, unwinkingly.

Bardoni had been told that under the compulsion of the ritual the scarab would be forced to speak.

Resisting the temptation to heave the red stone beetle against the wall, he finally said, "Well talk, damn you."

The stone lips moved like a ventriloquial dummy, and the scarab said, "I hear and obey, master of me, who utters the words of power and wears the ring that once great Thothmes wore."

The ring of Thoth? Was that what Le Comte de Saint Germain had placed on his finger? Considerably impressed, Bardoni asked, "What must I do?"

"Clasp your fingers around me, pressing the stone in the great ring against me firmly, close your eyes, and I will do as I must."

Disregarding the little Curator in the far corner, Bardoni

did as he was directed. It got rather boring and after a long silence, he heard the tiny reedy voice of the stone insect say, "Behold!"

There had been no sensation, none at all; as far as Bardoni was concerned, he was still standing like an idiot in a darkened room in an improbable museum, clasping a stone beetle in his hand.

But when he opened his eyes, he had to shut them fast. A noonday sun, white hot and brutal, slammed down at his eyeballs. He sustained a visual retention, even after he closed his eyes against that sudden assault of white sand; a tremendous building, and people—thousands of people, all milling around.

Eyes closed, he suddenly realized that the people were speaking, and that despite the oddness of their costumes, which ran to not much cloth, and intricate beards, and elaborate head dresses, he could understand what they were saying.

A man directly in front of him was drooling verbally as he said, "In all time, in all places, no woman has ever been so lovely as our queen, the exquisite, the incomparable, Hat Shet Set Sup."

Squinting his eyes, Bardoni risked another look. A palan-

quin, improbably decorated with ornate gold leaf and abortive looking figures, half man and half beast, was being carried past the vantage point where Bardoni stood.

Within the palanquin, reclining at her ease, was a most modern looking woman, despite the fact that Bardoni knew she and her mummy had long since been put on display in the Egyptological section of the museum that stood, he could swear it did, on Fifth Avenue in the Eighties, in Manhattan.

Her hair cut almost boyishly short, her finely chiselled profile familiar to him from all the reproductions that art stores sold, he was pleased to see that her body was as beautiful as her head.

All thought of her vanished from his mind as he looked into the gilded palanquin that followed her.

It, too, was carried on the burly shoulders of mammoth Ethiopian slaves.

In it was a human who was reclining as relaxedly as Queen Hat Shet Set Sup. However, this figure was that of a man, the features those that Bardoni knew as Le Comte de Saint Germain.

It was not hard to recognize that face even in the outfit that the Count was wearing, despite

the sharp curled beard that projected nannygoat-wise from his chin, and in spite of the plethora of objets d'art with which the man covered his arms, his fingers and his costume.

He looked like a living junk jewelry display, Bardoni thought dispassionately, just as a hand grabbed his forearm and jerked him around so that he no longer faced the procession that was perambulating at a snail's pace towards a temple in the distance.

There could be no doubt, Bardoni thought, that the man who had grabbed him was, in one form or another, a law officer. Things might change, costumes give way to other costumes, a cop might wear a blue uniform and carry a night stick, or a white sheet and a sword as this man did, but a cop was a cop.

The man's heavy, beefy face was contorted in a snarl.

"Just watching the procession," Bardoni said innocently.

"Just watching the procession." The man mimicked. "Just happened to be standing where only the high priest and his acolytes are allowed to stand, eh? Come along." Jerking Bardoni's arm, he forced Bardoni to accompany him. It was only then that Bardoni realized that he himself was suitably accoutred, for the officer of the law had hold of Bardoni's bare fore-

arm, above which a heavy gold bracelet cut into his biceps.

The officer snapped in the Egyptian equivalent, "Ya jerk! Ya realize that this brings you up before the ecclesiastical authorities? This is nuthin' for the magistrate's court. You're guilty of blasphemy. It's the sacred crocodiles for you, Mack."

That did not sound too pleasant and Bardoni tightened his grip on the red scarab as the officer dragged him through the colorful throng, away from the procession, towards a temple much smaller than the one to which Hat Shet Set Sup and the Egyptian Count de Saint Germain were going.

The inside of the temple was relatively cool. The aisle was set up between towering stone figures; Bardoni looked up at one whose jackal head, set on a human body seemed to be sneering down at him, and then studiously avoided looking at any other of the animal heads that hovered above him.

In the middle distance a very old man in priestly vestments was rubbing his parchment like hands together in glee, as he saw the officer drag Bardoni down the aisle towards him. His high pitched voice called out, "Today is my lucky day, I knew it, I knew it, ever since I cast that dog's intestines over my

shoulder at daybreak. Entrails never lie. It is a blasphemy case, is it not?"

The officer nodded. "Sure is. Got him dead to rights, too."

The old priest did a little jig of impure happiness.

Bardoni said, "Hold it, boys, I don't like to ruin anyone's day, but don't you think you better take a look at this?"

Instead of being quelled by the sight of the Ring of Thoth as Bardoni had thought the priest and the officer would be, they were delighted.

The priest chortled, "Entrails *never* lie. Oh happy day. The stolen Ring of Thoth. Oh we shall be able to make an example of this one. Blasphemy piled on blasphemy."

The officer said, "You'll have to cook up a new torture for this guy, won't you?"

"Oh my dear," the priest said in his thin voice, "I have devised torments undreamt of by the common run of humanity, and all my ingenuity will be able to express itself on this man!"

He danced around Bardoni, feeling his muscles, looking at his skin, and then said, "Oh, you'll last a long, long time. Perhaps I will even be able to employ the torture of tortures . . . the one that even Ptolemy said was too horrible . . ."

Putting the hand that held the scarab to his ear, Bardoni asked it, "What do I do now?"

"Tell him you demand the test by chance," the little reedy voice whispered. "He won't do it fairly of course, but that's up to you."

Bardoni cleared his throat, and roared in the silence of the temple, "I demand the test by chance!"

The priest was overwhelmed with delight. "Oh you are a knowledgeable one, aren't you? You know all the rules." His titter was really almost all that Bardoni could bear. The little priest hurried to a flat stone set in a niche in the wall, and took up a piece of papyrus.

Then scribbling rapidly, he seemed to write two words on the little bit of papyrus. That done, he tore it in half and folded up the two pieces.

Holding them in his hand so that Bardoni could not see them, he walked to an urn nearby and dropped the bits of papyrus into the urn.

"What's all this?" The officer wanted to know truculently.

"This wretched blasphemer must have trained well in the diabolical arts. He knows that he must be allowed to throw his case in the lap of the merciful God Ra." The priest's giggle gave the lie to the word *merci-*

ful. A pause, a giggle, and then the priest said, "According to the rules of the test, I have written innocent on one bit of papyrus and guilty on the other. If Ra directs his trembling fingers to the papyrus with innocent on it, then I dare take no action against him and must release him.

"But!" The priest chortled again. "If Ra directs his fingers to the guilty slip, as I am sure merciful Ra will, then he is mine to torture with all the rare and elegant devices that I have saved just for such an occasion."

The priest stopped giggling, and his senile old face was cruel as a sword blade as he said to Bardoni, "Impious one, choose your fate, at Ra's direction."

Bardoni walked slowly to the urn. The papyrus lay at the bottom of it. There was no conceivable way to determine which slip was which.

The scarab seemed to stir in his sweat wet hand and he put it to his ear.

The little reedy voice said, "You realize, of course, that the old faker has written 'guilty' on both the slips."

The floor beneath Bardoni's feet slipped and swayed. His mind turned over, and he almost retched at the unfairness of it all.

"Can you help me?" he asked the scarab in a thready tone.

"Of course not. You are on your own." The little thin voice tittered like an obscene echo of the priest's own giggle.

V

Looking down at the urn, Bardoni could not help but wonder at what he was doing here, and why he was doing it, and whether if he were tortured to death here it would be a real death. In any event, the idea of physical torment was not appetizing, and the prospect spurred his mind.

There was complete and utter silence in the shadowy temple as Bardoni stood with back to the priest and the officer of the Pharaoh's law, and suddenly darted his hand into the urn.

When he turned to face the two men, his jaws were working rhythmically as though he was chewing gum.

"What have you done?" the priest demanded indignantly. "Which slip did you choose?"

Gulping, Bardoni swallowed the bit of papyrus that he had been chewing with some difficulty and said airily, "Oh, I chose the slip that said innocent."

"Where is it, you lying blasphemer?"

"I swallowed it," Bardoni said innocently. "Why?"

"Swallowed it? Grab him guard, and I will . . ."

"You'll do nothing," Bardoni said truculently, feeling that he had been pushed around just about as much as he intended to allow himself to be manhandled. "Officer, remove the other slip from the urn, and if it says guilty on it, that will prove beyond doubt that I chose the innocent slip."

The priest's face was a study in baffled fury. The officer obeyed directions and, opening the slip before the priest's dancing eyes, he said, "The blasphemer is not a blasphemer, sir. See, he is right."

The priest sputtered.

"But, sir," the officer said, "you said that mighty Ra would decide the man's guilt or innocence, and He had done so."

"Tcha!" The old priest's claw-like hands were vibrating in a dance of rage.

Bardoni put the scarab to his ear, and said, "How'm I doing?"

"Fine," the little voice said. "But now pursue your advantage. This is what you have been brought on this perilous journey for. Demand from the priest the information you desire. Since you have bested him, he must

tell you that which you want to know."

Turning to the raging priest, Bardoni snarled, "Simmer down, you. I want you to tell me something. But first get rid of the flatfoot."

The priest with very bad grace dismissed the officer of the law. "What do you want to know?" His rage was seeping away, but Bardoni could tell that he and the priest were never going to be buddies.

"Tell me all you know, or can find out about the man who was in the palanquin following the Queen."

Shuddering, and taking a few steps backwards, the little man spluttered, "Has your audacity no end? How dare you ask about the Queen's lover?"

Bardoni snapped his finger irritably and said, "I don't want a song and dance. I want information. Get to work."

Shaking his head dubiously, the priest said, "I must do as you will, but I want you to know that I am doing so only under duress, and will not be responsible for anything that happens . . ." He gulped. ". . . to either of us. I shall skry for you."

It sounded like a popular tune, and Bardoni hummed to himself as the priest picked up a flat, saucer-like object and poured

inky black fluid into it. *I skried for you, now it's your turn to skry over me . . .* But then the priest was ready, and his gnarled finger was moiling the black liquid in the flat plate and his eyes were focused on the surface of the fluid.

Bardoni stepped to the man's side and watched over his shoulder as the little priest muttered an incantation and kept tracing cabalistic signs on the surface of the jet black fluid.

Suddenly, as though projected on the stygian surface, Bardoni saw a picture begin to take shape.

The priest was quite unhappy about the whole thing and kept moaning as the picture cleared, and he and Bardoni could see quite clearly a scene wherein the man that Bardoni knew as Saint Germain, but dressed in hierophant's robes, stood facing an identical twin. The two Count de Saint Germain stared deep into each other's eyes for a long moment, and faintly indicated, above their identical faces, could be seen the outlines of Ra's face.

With no warning at all, one of the twins suddenly flashed a knife. It flickered and then was rammed deep into the chest of the other Count Saint Germain. The face of the god vanished. Then the living Count, a wild

exaltation on his face, used his foot to roll the corpse over onto its face.

The priest whispered, "Oh monstrous blasphemy! He has murdered his Ka!"

Then the picture shifted and to Bardoni's incredulous surprise he was now looking at a representation of the whole earth. The ball spun around on its axis in space. It was as though he was looking down at the globe from the moon. What happened next caused Bardoni to rub his eyes, for like a double exposure there gradually appeared still another earth, this one inextricably interwoven with the first one, but slightly off to one side so that parts of it were enveloped in the other.

Two planets, he thought in fuzzy bewilderment, co-existing, one within the other, neither visible to the other . . .

The picture became clearer and it was as though Bardoni was in a rocket ship on the way from the moon to the earth. But suddenly the priest's hand shook and he dropped the plate to the floor. The black fluid ran in random shapes over the temple floor.

The priest gasped, "No more, I conjure you, no more. I will not, I cannot show you more . . ."

Before Bardoni could realize

what had happened, the little man ran off behind a statue.

Putting the scarab to his ear, Bardoni asked, "What now?"

The scarab whispered, "Look at the entrance to the temple."

The blood in Bardoni's veins didn't really freeze, it just seemed that way. Framed in the doorway stood the man he knew as the Count Saint Germain, his Egyptian clothes all awry, his face a mask of menace.

His hands wove together in a series of gestures that Bardoni knew instinctively were inimical to his welfare.

Bardoni said to the scarab, "Let's get out of here!"

He closed his eyes, not knowing whether he was surrendering to those horrid hand gestures or whether he was making good his escape. He knew, beyond any shadow of a doubt that what the Count was doing was not good . . .

When he opened his eyes the first thing he saw was the little curator, Mr. Charlier, still seated in the corner of the room in the museum, still busy scribbling in his notebook.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Bardoni said to the scarab, "What now?"

There was no answer.

Opening his hand wider, Bardoni looked closely at the little eyes on the stone scarab. They

no longer seemed alive. As a matter of fact, the red stone suddenly seemed just that, a red stone, crudely carved into the shape of a scarab beetle.

The fussy curator snapped, "That's all you'll get out of the scarab." Then under his breath, he muttered, "The very idea! Next thing I know they'll be saddling me with kiddies."

Uncertainly, Bardoni replaced the scarab in the museum case, and wondered what to do next. Then he remembered the injunction contained in the absurd doggerel that the demon had chanted.

He had used Carnavon's scarab for what that was worth; next he had to use the petrified tree . . . and then, and only then, the mouth of Adonis. He resolutely put out of his mind the way the demon had giggled after reciting the poem.

Picking up the paper bag containing the black rooster and feeling his pockets to be sure he still had the dagger and the package of rare herbs, Bardoni said, "I'd like to be taken to the petrified tree now, Mr. Charlier."

Adjusting his pince-nez, the curator said, "Anything you say, mine not to reason why, mine but to do or die . . ."

Another long walk through

corridors where their feet left behind them resounding echoes, and then they entered a room whose walls were hung with flaming crimson drapes on which were embroidered some rather indecent possibilities in the way of men with maids.

Averting his eyes, Bardoni said, "The tree?"

The curator pointed to a raised podium. On top of it was a long sort of bolster, or mattress, which, like everything else in the room, was covered with the eye-searing crimson cloth.

Resting on it was what might once have been a tree, a living thing, but which the process of time had calcified. Bardoni found it rather doubtful that even the vagrant whim of playful Mother Nature could have contrived such an unlikely shape for a tree to grow into.

But that was none of his business.

Pretending that the shape of the tree was fortuitous, Bardoni looked around till he found a vessel in the shape of an open kettle. As a matter of fact he thought dully, it looked rather like the kind of cooking instrument that cartoonists draw when they want to show a missionary being boiled for the delectation of epicurean cannibals.

The kettle was heavy, but he

managed to move it the way garbage collectors maneuver garbage cans and, when he finally had it right in front of the tip of the tree, he reached into his pocket and opened the bag of herbs and sprinkled them into the pot, chanting as he did so the obscure syllables that he had been taught in the taxicab on the way to the museum.

As he crushed the herbs in his fingers the odors began to seep out into the air, and he found them singularly unappetizing.

Next he took the sleepy rooster out of the bag and held it over the kettle. He didn't like what he had to do next, but he used the wicked looking dagger as he had been directed to do, and dropped the defunct fowl into the pot.

Then, weaving his fingers together as he had been shown how to do, he began to mumble the meaningless words that he had learned.

If the tree, he thought in a section of his mind that was not concerned with what he was doing, came to life the way the scarab had done, it was going to present a rather unlikely picture.

Then, as he continued the formula, a thought occurred to him. This was all the ritual that he had been taught. What hap-

pened next? What was he to do to call on Adonis, or was this ritual with the petrified tree part of the Adonis worship?

His second thought was the correct one, he found as the smell of the herbs co-mingled with that of the rooster's fresh blood.

Whatever function the smells, the death of the bird, and the words of the chant were supposed to perform was in the process of happening.

All around him the unseemly pictures wove into the crimson cloth began to move, at first slowly, then more rapidly. It was as though they were beginning to come alive. The result was a little overwhelming.

The curator paid no attention to the process that was going on around him, which struck Bardoni as being odd, since directly over Mr. Charlier's head a sort of daisy chain arrangement was proceeding apace.

Bardoni came to the end of the formula that he had memorized. That left him with nothing to do but stand and watch bug-eyed the proceedings in the embroidery.

From nowhere and from everywhere, a deep bass voice, organ-like, overwhelming in its sheer virile masculinity said slowly, "One assumes that one

has not been appealed to in vain."

The very words carried menace.

Stammering a little, Bardoni gulped and said, conscious of the fact that in comparison his own voice suddenly seemed thin, and almost falsetto, "Oh, no, mighty Adonis." At least he hoped it was not to be in vain. "By the powers that invest me," he said hesitantly, "and by the acts I have performed, I am empowered to ask Adonis three questions."

"You are." The deep rumble was almost deafening.

"Why did Count de Saint Germain, or whatever his name really is, murder his Ka, his other self, his soul, back in ancient Egypt?"

"In order to have life everlasting, fool! Why else?"

"Those two worlds I saw in the blackness of the skrying bowl. What were they?"

"The two worlds that *are*, idiot mortal." Then, in a deep grumbling aside, the booming voice said, "To wake mighty Adonis for childish prattle . . . would that I were not constrained . . ."

One question . . . and only one question left.

Bardoni tried desperately to make sense out of what he had seen in the skrying bowl and the

comparatively cryptic answers that Adonis was so grudgingly giving him.

He had to, he must take a chance and try to get two answers from one question.

Aloud he asked, bluffing mightily, "Since I am not in my own world, how can I return to it?"

A hoarse bellow of rage was for a moment his only answer.

Then, "To disturb me for these moronic questions!" Then silence. Finally the voice said, "Imbecile, you strain my patience! Know you not that all you need to do is remove the ring from off your finger?"

This time the silence was not disturbed.

That is, not until the curator said, "Well, really, how long are you going to stand there with that dumbfounded look on your face? Come along, come along, I have done all I can for you."

But the man actually had to push petulantly at Bardoni before he could make Bardoni begin to move.

Outside on the steps of the museum, Bardoni still stood thunderstruck, looking down at the curious ring on the middle finger of his right hand. Behind him the curator angrily slammed closed the museum's door.

And then Bardoni was alone in the night, on the steps of a

magic museum, in a world that he not only never made, but in whose reality he did not quite believe.

All that mumbo jumbo and what had he really learned?

Down on the sidewalk a passing patrolman sauntered by.

The police!

And they wanted him for questioning as to the whereabouts of a man who had been alive when Hat Shet Set Sup lived . . . a man who, if Bardoni was to believe what he had learned, was immortal.

It was a little hard to take.

In his pocket he could feel the primer of incantations that his friend had insisted he take along with him. Waiting till the policeman was gone from sight, Bardoni flicked through the pages of the book. Hoping that by some chance there might be an inkling, some kind of clue in the printed words, he skimmed the pages.

A chapter heading caught his eye: *The Three Easiest Methods of Levitating a Human*. Interesting, he thought disconsolately, but hardly relevant at the moment. Shoving the book back into his pocket, he stared at the ring on his finger.

If there were really, which he doubted, two worlds existing side by side, with no one suspecting the existence of the

other, or the way they interpenetrated each other extra-dimensionally, then all he had to do, according to Adonis, was to slip the ring off his finger and he would be back in the other world, the earth that was to him the only reality.

Timorously, he touched the ring, tried to pull it off his finger.

Instantly, he staggered as though hit by a blackjack.

Inside his head he heard the Count de Saint Germain's voice warning him of instant death if he removed the ring.

A fine how do you do, he thought angrily; if there were two earths and this ring was the way of getting from one to the other, how the hell was he going to make the trip if he couldn't take the ring off?

Suddenly he was vastly irritated with what had happened to him. Angry at the way he was being put upon. He did not doubt for an instant that the Count was using him for some fell purpose, but he did not want to be the cat's paw in a complicated inter-worldly plot. He didn't want to remain in a world where real magic worked, where there were pet demons and assorted cabalistic gestures that worked wonders. He wanted to get home. To rabbits that didn't talk, and night club audiences

who, while they might be drunken bums, at least were the kind of bums that he understood. And he didn't want to meet any more simulacra of his friends who looked and acted like people he knew but were simultaneously capable of setting physical laws at naught.

Realizing that he was enjoying a rather childish rage, he nevertheless managed to work himself into a fury about the unfairness of it all.

Why in the name of all that was holy, or unholy, had the Count selected him on whom to work this hugger mugger? Why couldn't some other sucker have been employed?

Descending the steps slowly, feeding fuel to his anger, trying to work himself up to a pitch to where he would be able to overcome the compulsion not to remove the ring, he was conscious at first only vaguely but then more acutely that the silence of the night was being disrupted by what seemed like an orderly riot.

Fifth Avenue stretched away from him serene and quiet, its streets tree lined, the fancy apartment houses clean and handsome, but keening his ears was the sound of many police sirens.

A tramp, disheveled and un-

kempt, staggered to his feet from his bed on a park bench nearby and said, "Wha's goes? Hah? Wha' goes any old how?"

To Bardoni's right, he saw a dolly car racing towards him. To his left, a paddy wagon rolled through the night. From the north, a phalanx of policemen on foot; from the south, more dolly cars.

The passing patrolman, the one who had sauntered by, must have recognized him, Bardoni realized. There would be, after all, no trouble in finding publicity pictures of him . . . and with his face known, they had spotted him.

But why all the hustle and bustle? Anyone would have thought that he'd robbed a bank, or assassinated a president, the way they were calling out the reserves.

The tramp staggered drunkenly towards Bardoni, saying, "I'll go quietly offisher. If I'd known you wanted me, I'da come to the station house. You didn't have to send out all the boys for me . . ."

A policeman, whose gold buttons and badge proclaimed him to be a sergeant, yelled out, "Bardoni, don't move! We've got you covered!"

What had he done? Or what did they think he'd done to warrant all this? The Count de Saint

Germain, he realized must be pretty big potatoes in this world to warrant all this fuss.

Turning towards the sergeant, Bardoni called across the intervening twenty feet that separated them. "I'll go quietly officer, but why do you want me?"

The sergeant bellowed, "Ho, ho, that's rich! The President's adviser and right hand man vanishes, and this punk was last seen with him, and then wants to know why we want him!"

The tramp lurched into Bardoni as the encircling police came closer. The sergeant roared out, "Careful everyone, he's a magician you know . . . get the detective from the Magic Squad up here, fast! Before this guy pulls anything!"

The order was sent back through the ranks of the police.

Bardoni swung towards the tramp, and said, "How'd you like a present?"

The tramp's eyes gleamed. "Me, I'd like it fine," he said.

Extending his hand, Bardoni said, "Here, I'm going to jail anyhow. You can have this ring, if you can pull it off my finger!"

VI

The tramp's dirty fingers grappled with the ring, and it

slipped right off. Bardoni closed his eyes, exulting. It was off, and he had not died. And with it off, supposedly he was no longer in the insane world of magic, but back in his own world where tricks were tricks and he was a working magician, and where he was not involved with the envanishment of the President's right hand man, and he could just open his eyes and walk home to his rabbit that didn't talk, and maybe call Judy and go out and have a bite to eat, if she didn't have a date with the damned sax player.

Opening his eyes, with an exultant grin splitting his face, he instantly reclosed them.

The tramp still stood next to him looking at the odd ring which he held.

All around the tramp and Bardoni, the police came closer, and closer.

Behind them—Bardoni swivelled his head—behind him, the museum still stood like an ancient, gigantic sarcophagus.

The tramp said, "Jeeze, thanks mister, but do you think the cops are gonna let me keep it?"

The nearest policeman, the sergeant had a pair of handcuffs out, ready to snap them on Bardoni's wrists. In sheer and utter frustration, Bardoni looked about him frantically. Was

there no chance at all for escape? Nowhere.

But as he rotated his head, exploring every avenue, he saw a sign on a lamp post. A sign that had not been there a moment ago. Bardoni's heart leapt up in gratitude. What if the police were after him. What if he were thrown in jail?

He read and re-read the words on the sign, the sweetest words he had ever read. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, the sign said.

Then the handcuffs closed on his wrists and no detective from the "Magic Squad" made his appearance and Bardoni was thrown into a patrol wagon and carried off into the night.

The tramp watched thunder-struck for a long, long while; then, shrugging, he turned the ring on his finger and admired it in the light from a lamp post.

The tramp who had appeared in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art was not even aware that he had been moved to another world. Merely aware that the disturbance was dying down, he shrugged and returned to his hard bed on the park bench.

Bardoni was considerably confused when the patrol wagon drove, not to police headquarters, but out to Long Island to La Guardia Airport.

The handcuffs remained on

his wrist, the sergeant who sat next to him in the plane seat was uncommunicative, and all that Bardoni knew was that he was being flown to Washington, D. C.

His handcuffs were not removed until he was seated in an ante-chamber outside the room in which the President held weekly press conferences.

A terrific babble of voices was coming through the doorway and without trying to eavesdrop, Bardoni was able to hear the president say, "Gentlemen! Really, it's not as if I were alone in this. You must remember that Mackenzie King, for so long a capable and just administrator, for so many years the Premier of Canada, was a sincere believer in spiritualism. Now while I am not willing to say that I am a believer, I do say that I will wait till the Count de Saint Germain has shown me what he calls his proofs."

There was another outburst, quelled by the President saying, "And don't forget gentlemen that I have been for years an amateur magician. No corny tricks of the average fake spirit medium are going to deceive me!

"Besides that, I have called in a council of reputable men of science and they, too, will sit in judgment on what Count de Saint Germain has called com-

plete and final proof of the existence of spiritualism.

"I know," the President said, "that must strike all of you as bizarre beyond compare; I have kept this quiet up until now, for fear of what the public's reaction would be. But now, in half an hour, the Count has promised a demonstration that will make converts of the most doubting.

"If five of you gentlemen of the press can be selected by lot, they may join the committee of scientists and me, when the Count shows us whatever it is he wants to demonstrate."

Another outburst of many men's voices and then the President's voice, which Bardoni knew so well from the radio, from newsreels and from television appearances, roared out, "Gentlemen, do you think for one moment I would have precipitated this affair, had I not seen the Count perform certain things that are beyond all explanation? Well then, wait and see what transpires at the seance, before you condemn or make complete and utter fools of yourselves!"

Bardoni sat looking off into space. When Le Comte de Saint Germain had been high in favor in France, the Revolution had come close on heels. In Russia, another revolution. He showed up in New York, the depression

followed. His seamed face was seen and suddenly Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But that had been on the other world. Or had it been on both worlds. Anyhow, now . . .

Shuddering, Bardoni wondered what new horror the incredibly aged man who had murdered his Ka had up his sleeve.

Let him put this across; put him in the position of controlling the President of the United States . . . and who could guess what devastation, destruction, death and despair might follow?

It was a case of think-of-the-devil.

A small door to one side opened and the Count entered. He dismissed the sergeant of police, who seemed happy to leave such an elevated atmosphere and return to his more mundane spheres of activity.

As soon as he was gone, the Count snapped, "You idiot!"

It was bad enough having Adonis call him names, Bardoni felt, but he didn't see why he had to take much nonsense from the Count.

"To jeopardize all my plans, because in your imbecilic fashion you thought you could return to your own world!" The nictitating eyelids flashed up and down as the Count brought his accordion-pleated wrinkled face close to Bardoni and whis-

pered, "Understand this, you lunatic, there is no chance at all for you to return to your world, unless and until I send you there and bring that other Mongolian idiot back to this world."

He was being called an idiot in both of his persons, Bardoni realized and didn't like it. But he was cheered to find that the Count was not omniscient, that he did not know that the Bardoni who sat in front of him was not the real magician, but was the trickster, the hanky panky man.

But the Count went on, "Now listen to me. As I have told you and even you in your dim witted fashion should be able to understand, once you have come from your world to this, your real magic powers fade inside of a fortnight, or three weeks at the most. I have been back and forth so often that my powers are, at the moment, and until I can go back home again for awhile, at very low ebb. They must be re-charged occasionally. Your powers are fresh and will stay so long enough to do what I want done.

"Therefore, in twenty minutes when I put on the seance that I have promised the President, you will bring about the manifestations that I need!

"Understand me? Or else you

will never be able to return to your world!"

The Count turned and walked away from Bardoni, exulting aloud, as he paced back and forth, looking like an evil Cardinal Richelieu, "With the President of these sprawling states in both worlds in my power, what horrors can I not wreak! I shall build up enough evil so that I can walk between the many worlds, free, the master of all I survey. Not all the evil that I have banked through all these myriad years can hold a candle to what I will be able to do now . . ."

To be able to put evil in the bank seemed like an odd kind of bookkeeping to Bardoni but he kept his mouth shut as the ancient man said, "Never, not since the birth of this ridiculous pair of matched planets has there ever been, or will there ever be anyone to come up to my shoulder as far as power is concerned.

"To think, with success in my grasp, I will no longer have to return to that other world to re-charge my magic, but will instead be able to wander where I will, to far Alpha Centauri and beyond the most distant planetary systems known to man . . . that crawling insect befouled by his own short sightedness . . ."

There probably would have been a lot more in that vein, Bardoni thought, but at that point one of the President's aide de camps entered the room and said, "Whenever you are ready, Count."

"The Count snapped his fingers in irritation and then said, "Presently. I shall be ready in two minutes." Then he stepped close to Bardoni and whispered, "You remember my instructions? Follow them or you risk my eternal displeasure."

"You'd better run over them once more," Bardoni said, realizing that he hadn't the vaguest idea what the Count meant.

Tensely, irately, the Count said, "I don't want to risk transporting any real demons from our world, therefore, you are, by the aid of your magic, by incantation and spell, to give the appearance of a spiritualistic seance. Got it, stupid?"

"Umm, I guess so," Bardoni said hesitantly. "But just what effects do you want me to perform?"

"Cretin!" The Count was close to the edge of a maniacal fury. "With all the magicians in our world why did I pick you?"

That was a good question. "Why did you?" Bardoni asked.

"Just at random. What earthly or unearthly difference did it

make as long as I chose a competent master of enchantment?"

Bardoni realized it had been just his lousy luck that the Count had picked his identical twin in that other world . . . and therefore had to transport him to switch the other guy here.

Le Comte de Saint Germain whispered, "Now remember, you are to levitate, to conjure up wraiths, and to force them to speak in the voices that the President expects to hear them use."

"I gotcha," Bardoni said. "But you'd better stall for a couple of minutes. And get me the use of an official car. I forgot some of the mystic herbs I'm going to need!"

This time it really looked as if the aged man was going to have a stroke. His face turned blackly red, then he caught his breath, and said, "I will not lose my temper, I will not lose my temper!"

But, against his will, he was forced to accede to Bardoni's request.

Moments later, racing through the circuitous streets of Washington, Bardoni prayed that another magic dealer friend of his, Harry Baker, would have his shop open. Luckily it was not far from the presidential headquarters, and, leaving the

official car parked at the curb with its motor running and its obvious Secret Service man chauffeur looking puzzledly after him, Bardoni rushed up the steps of Harry's shop.

Harry was not in the shop, but Bardoni saw Dolly Snow in back of the counter, and he prevailed on the blonde assistant to get him what he wanted.

Then, smiling his thanks, he left her looking baffled, as he ran out of the shop and back to the car.

Three minutes later, he was dashing back into the antechamber, his pockets bulging with his new acquisitions.

The Count snarled, "Are you ready now? Finally?"

Bardoni nodded. He was ready, all right!

There was a lot of protocol involved in the seating arrangements, and the President was tapping his fingers impatiently on the long mahogany table long before everyone, scientist and reporter, was seated properly as high echelon etiquette demanded.

The Count seemed removed from all worldly considerations as he stood in a corner of the room looking impassively out the window, out toward the imposing building that houses the Congress of the United States.

Bardoni could imagine what wild rampaging dreams of evil power the Count was allowing himself.

But then, at long last, all was ready.

The President said, "Gentlemen, Le Comte de Saint Germain."

Barely nodding, the Count acknowledged the introduction; and then indicating the lights that flooded the room, his strange voice husky with strain that did not show in his impassive face, he said, "If any of you has ever gone to fake spirit mediums, you know only too well that they demand darkness and hocus pocus with much singing of hymns and grunting and groaning. You will note, that I demand none of these aids to deception.

"This will be a full light seance."

Nodding to Bardoni, the Count continued, "My assistant, Mr. Bardoni, and I will now prove beyond any shadow of doubt that spirits live."

The scientists at the long table were still, their faces avidly turned to the Count; Bardoni realized how much they wanted to attack and tear the Count to shreds. He hoped he wasn't included in their plans. Newsmen, on the other hand, preserved their reputation for impar-

tiality and sat, one and all, with cynical smiles on their faces, a show-me attitude that challenged everything the Count said and did."

Only the President, Bardoni saw, was really concerned with what was going to happen. With the President in the Count's vest pocket, Bardoni thought, what horror could be expected . . . World War III with destruction unparalleled in the history of the human race; or perhaps, since the Count expected so much of all this, perhaps he was planning on the complete destruction of the world.

That raised a puzzling question. Would the destruction of one world end the other intradimensionally woven world?

No time now for any further mental questions.

Holding his hand up for attention, which he need not have bothered to do, since every eye in the room was glued on him, the Count said, "Spirits, I would ask indulgence of you. Manifest yourselves for these gentlemen, give them any and all proofs that they, in their doubts, demand."

Bardoni's hands were busy under the table at which he sat, off to one side of the big conference table. No one was watching him, any more than any member of any audience ever

watches the magician's assistant.

They sat and watched the Count, just as all audiences watch the man in the spotlight, the performing magician.

Eerily, a tenuous finger of what spiritualists call ectoplasm slowly meandered across the room, fragile as a child's dream; incoherent as a druggard nightmare, it floated, and assumed various shapes as it came closer, ever closer to the President.

No one in the room moved a muscle.

All eyes were frozen on the "ectoplasm."

The President sighed a breathy sigh of relief, and said, "See, gentlemen, didn't I tell you?"

The Count said, "Silence, please, Mr. President. Just keep watching."

The very tip of the grayish impalpable substance split and became many fingered, then these seemed to weave together, become more and more solid.

Then and only then, the Count said, "Now, gentlemen, I will force this extension from the 'bourne from which no man returneth,' to open a way for anyone that you desire."

A babble of voices, fear-filled mutterings, and then the President said, "I don't know about the rest of you, but I have al-

ways admired Benjamin Franklin. Would you have his spirit put in an appearance?"

"Certainly, sir," the Count said, his odd eyes turning briefly to Bardoni as though warning him to do as he was told. "I admire your choice of the illustrious dead.

"Franklin of all people, this young republic's choice of ambassador to France. Franklin the last universal genius, but for me." The Count smiled immodestly, then continued, "You might Mr. President, considering Mr. Franklin's intellectual achievements, ask his advice on that knotty problem you spoke of to me."

"Good idea," the President's lean bony face smiled. "Let's see if he agrees with you, Count."

The cloud of grayish material was circular now, hanging in the center of the room, and it seemed to Bardoni, who eyed it dispassionately, that any outsider looking into the room might well imagine that the cloud was being held there by the intensity of the glances that the scientists and the reporters were according it.

The pivot of all their eyes, it hung like one's breath on a crisp wintry morning.

Bardoni was really busy now, his hands racing to each of his pockets in turn, manipulating

certain devices, making certain adjustments.

The Count said almost threateningly, "Franklin, appear." But Bardoni knew that the words were directed to him, and not to the cloud of "ectoplasm" that was the magnet for all eyes.

Hoping against hope that the President was a better amateur magician than most, Bardoni proceeded with the dangerous game that he was playing. The stakes were high.

The fate of the world.

VII

At first the cloud of gray material was merely round, but then slowly, exceedingly slowly it began to assume a shape that might, by a stretch of the imagination be considered humanoid.

What could have been lips slowly opened, and a heavy voice said, "Who calls?"

There was no doubt about it, Bardoni thought, it was a hell of an effect. The reporters gasped, the scientists were now exchanging uneasy glances.

The Count said, "Hurry it up! Mr. Franklin, arrange yourself."

The voice that might have been coming from anywhere said irritably, "Keep your shirt on, Count. It's not easy to pull one's ectoplasm together."

Those nictatating lids came up, Bardoni saw, as the Count sent a glance of raging fury at him. Bardoni's face was completely immobile, his lips unmoving as the voice that the audience seemed to think belonged to Benjamin Franklin said, "Break it off, Buster, you can't push me around! I'm dead!"

Tottering, the Count walked towards the pall of gray, smoking material and, his hands raised as though to disperse it, he cried to the President, "I regret, sir, that seemingly a poltergeist has interfered."

The President explained in an aside, "Poltergeists are very difficult, they are rather like imbecile demons, the spirit of the insane. They are given to breaking dishes, and making noises in untenanted houses. Very irritating."

The Count's wrinkles seemed to become more wrinkled, if that was possible. Staring at the "ectoplasm," he said, "Poltergeist, begone, Franklin, appear!" From the center of the gray cloud, a voice seemed to say, "Nuts to you, you old faker! Why don't you go back to where you belong?"

There could be no doubt about it, Bardoni thought, immortal the old boy might be, but close to an apoplectic stroke he was. The Count pretended to be

speaking to the grayish cloud, but his words were directed to Bardoni.

"Go back, poltergeist, beware my wrath. Begone, or you will rue the day that saw you born of woman!"

Since poltergeists were never born, let alone of a woman, Bardoni knew the threat was directed at him.

Insolently, the disembodied voice snapped, "Go roll your hoop, Count, you've had it. Who do you think you're kidding with this corn ball routine?"

The President was turning his head one way and then the other, like a spectator at a tennis game, from the "ectoplasm" to the maddened Count.

Stepping directly through the gray cloud and dispersing it, the Count tottered towards Bardoni, his white hands looking like claws as he reached for Bardoni's throat.

"Come what may," the words came thickly, "I'm going to kill you for this!"

Then two men, who up till that point had seemed like reporters, kicked their chairs back, and in that one move revealed themselves to be Secret Servicemen.

Just as they grabbed the Count's fragile body, his hands reached Bardoni's throat.

Bardoni said, "How far did you think you could push me?"

Then the President's guards were holding the Count. They had to lift him off the floor, for like a child gone berserk, he was kicking with his feet, flailing his arms around, screaming at the top of his lungs as he said, "You're not the right Bardoni . . . you're the one I sent to the other world!"

Bardoni rose to his feet, and bowed mockingly. He said, "You're post-hypnotic command not to remove the ring didn't work."

"Adonis must have told you!" The Count said, and then there was a slackening in the mad fury that writhed across his face, and suddenly his body went limp.

One of the scientists left the conference table, and took a quick look at the Count. Then he said, "I'm afraid this old gentleman has had a stroke."

Maliciously Bardoni thought, so go on being immortal, you old louse . . . live forever, but with a brain that no longer functions in all its parts. Let's see how much trouble you can stir up for my world now, you ancient reprobate!

And then the Count's unconscious body was being removed, and the President was at Bardoni's side while all the other

men in the room were busy talking to each other. In the little area of quiet around the President and the hanky panky man, the President said, "Thank you."

Smiling, Bardoni said, "So you almost fell for that charlatan, eh, Mr. President?"

"I recognize you now. You're Bardoni the magician, aren't you?"

Nodding, Bardoni waited.

"You're right. I did almost fall for him. But, Bardoni, the first time he performed for me . . . I swear he did things that magic and trickery cannot account for . . . that's why I called this meeting . . . if he had performed today what he did that first time, I assure you that the world would have accepted his chicanery as proof of life after death . . ."

Lucky, lucky day, Bardoni thought, that had allowed him to be present at this meeting.

The President said, "That was very cute, the seance you rigged up." Then, like any amateur magician anywhere, the President of the United States added, "Look, Bardoni, I have a little card effect that's fooled everyone I've shown it to. I'll swap it with you for the secret of how you managed to control that fake ectoplasm."

"You knew I was ventriloquizing the spirit voice?" Bardoni

asked, trying to change the subject.

"Oh, surely, surely, as soon as I spotted what you were doing under the table I knew what was up. But tell me, how did you control the chemical ectoplasm?"

Poor President, poor amateur magician, Bardoni thought. That was the one thing he could not reveal. He had bought the fake ectoplasm in the Harry Baker magic shop. But he had controlled it by a spell he had read in the little book that his friend in the other world had given him.

Aloud he said, "I'm sorry, sir, but that was given me by an old Hindu fakir, and I had to swear never to reveal the trick or he would not have taught it to me."

That the President was disappointed there was no doubt, but Bardoni managed to do some close-up impromptu tricks, three of which he taught the President, and that seemed to take care of the matter.

Then there was a long harangue in which the President asked the reporters to keep the whole unseemly seance off the record, and then finally Bardoni was free to leave.

He flew away from Washington with the President's words of gratitude ringing in his ears and a letter signed by the President, praising his skill, which

was going right into his advertising brochures the following day. It was only when he was sitting at his ease in the special plane that the President had commandeered for him that Bardoni was able to relax and wonder how long the Count's stroke would completely incapacitate him, and whether it would end forever his ability to do evil.

That, Bardoni decided, was in the lap of the gods. He had done all he could, he had given his little all; and only now could he heave a vast sigh of relief as he realized how grateful the whole world should be to him . . .

For that he had saved the world from destruction he did not doubt. The fact that no one was ever going to know it was irritating, but . . . his hand touched the primer of magic spells. But there were going to be rewards at that.

A beatific smile on his face, and he fell asleep, dreaming of how he was going to baffle the hell out of the boys in the magic shops and his audiences, when he performed *real* magic for them!

And the reality if anything surpassed his dreams.

When he entered Tannen's magic shop, bowing, and calmly proceeded to float up into the air, reclining at his ease as he

did so, the expression on the other magicians' faces was worth every bit of the trouble through which he had gone. That and the way they sneaked up to him and offered him everything in their power, if he would only reveal his secret.

Gloating, he worked out a routine that took him and Judy right out of the honky-tonk night clubs and to the stage of Radio City.

Dwarfed by the immensity of the largest stage in all the world, he made his entrance, the tremendous symphonic orchestra playing his music, Judy at one side of him, her eyes wide with amazement, as he tossed his hat to one side, where it floated, while without his even touching the levitated hat, a bunny appeared out of it by magic.

And not one rabbit, but a stage full of them, a plethora. An over-abundance of them, hundreds of rabbits, thousands of rabbits, which at a gesture from the Great Bardoni, suddenly merged and became one huge gigantic rabbit that wavered for a moment and then vanished.

Then at a muttered incantation from Bardoni, Judy became invisible.

What a gasp that brought

from the four thousand people in the audience!

Wonder piled on wonder and, there in the front row, Bardoni could see every magician in America sitting with their faces frozen, their minds a blank as they tried to imagine what conceivable gimmicks he was using, as piling Pelion on Ossa, he proceeded *really* to do every magic effect that every magician had ever done by means of gimmicks, gadgets, mirrors and sundry other devices. In the front row, Harry Blackstone, his white, white hair a beacon, watched as amazed as any layman, and around him magicians, amateurs and such professionals as Walter Essman, Bill Simon, Frank Garcia, Rickie Dunn and all, sat stunned.

Never in the history of the entertainment world had there ever been such an overnight sensation.

It got so you could not turn on a television set without seeing his smiling face, without seeing him do something completely baffling, completely inexplicable. One day he was on television more than Arthur Godfrey!

His agent was almost insane with joy.

He was able to take an ad in *Variety* that bragged, *The Great Bardoni, Booked Solid Till 1965!*

Those bookings came in handy when, two weeks and three days after he had prevailed on the drunken tramp to remove the mystic ring of Thothmes, he made his entrance on the Radio City Music Hall stage, levitated himself fifteen feet in the air, then, sitting cross legged on nothingness, as he had begun to do for an opening, floated casually out over the audience, throwing bon bons as he went. Behind him on the stage, Judy, as baffled as any member of the audience, watched with baited breath as he showed off a bit and did barrel rolls over the audience, smiling down at their upturned faces; then, not satisfied with that, he straightened out his body, floated over the loges, a spotlight following his every move, and, poising on the rail of the loges, he did a swan dive over the orchestra.

Judy was the only one who realized that something had gone wrong, for suddenly, when he was halfway down from the loges, he seemed to quiver.

Losing altitude, he fluttered his arms, like broken wings, and then everyone realized that something had gone wrong, for his face contorted with despair and he fell the last fifteen feet, to land in a crumpled heap in an aisle.

It was only when he had picked himself up and felt his limbs to reassure himself that nothing was broken that he knew what had happened.

As he had feared, the magic was gone. It had worn off at last.

He finished his act with his usual gimmicked magic tricks, displaying his virtuoso sleight of hand, but gone were the days of emulating Apollonius of Tyana. He was once more a hanky panky man.

Audiences in the hinterlands wondered, but not too audibly, why a year earlier the papers had been full of Bardoni's exploits, when all they saw was a fairly stock stage magician performing pretty run-of-the-mill tricks for them; but publicity has a real magic of its own, and Bardoni was able to stay on the crest for much longer than the average ten-day sensation.

And when it was all over and he was once more just a regular magic act, back working night clubs and battling hecklers, he never let it bother him, for he had had his heart's desire.

And how few men, magicians or not, ever have that?

With Kit Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, Bardoni could say, "'Tis magicke, magicke that hath ravisht me . . ."

Out In The Garden

BY PHILIP K. DICK

ILLUSTRATED BY FREAS

Peggy, of course, was a nice girl. It was obvious there couldn't be anything wrong with her fondness for Sir Francis, the drake, And anyhow, what's a god or so among civilized people?

"That's where she is," Robert Nye said. "As a matter of fact, she's always out there. Even when the weather's bad. Even in the rain."

"I see," his friend Lindquist said, nodding. The two of them pushed open the back door and stepped out onto the porch. The air was warm and fresh. They both stopped, taking a deep breath. Lindquist looked around. "Very nice-looking garden. It's really a garden, isn't it?" He shook his head. "I can understand her, now. Look at it!"

"Come along," Nye said, going down the steps onto the path. "She's probably sitting on the other side of the tree. There's an old seat in the form of a circle, like you used to see in the old days. She's probably sitting with Sir Francis."

"Sir Francis? Who's that?"

Lindquist came along, hurrying behind him.

"Sir Francis is her pet duck. A big white duck." They turned down the path, past the lilac bushes, crowded over their great wooden frames. Rows of tulips in full bloom stretched out on both sides. A rose trellis stretched up the side of a small greenhouse. Lindquist stared in pleasure. Rose bushes, lilacs, endless shrubs and flowers. A wall of wisteria. A massive willow tree.

And sitting at the foot of the tree, gazing down at a white duck in the grass beside her, was Peggy.

Lindquist stood rooted to the spot, fascinated by Mrs. Nye's beauty. Peggy Nye was small, with soft dark hair and great warm eyes, eyes filled with a gentle, tolerant sadness. She was buttoned up in a little blue coat

and suit, with sandals on her feet and flowers in her hair. Roses.

"Sweetheart," Nye said to her, "look who's here. You remember Tom Lindquist, don't you?"

Peggy looked up quickly. "Tommy Lindquist!" she exclaimed. "How are you? How nice it is to see you."

"Thanks." Lindquist shuffled a little in pleasure. "How have you been, Peg? I see you have a friend."

"A friend?"

"Sir Francis. That's his name, isn't it?"

Peggy laughed. "Oh, Sir Francis." She reached down and smoothed the duck's feathers. Sir Francis went on searching out spiders from the grass. "Yes, he's a very good friend of mine. But, won't you sit down? How long are you staying?"

"He won't be here very long," her husband said. "He's driving through to New York on some kind of business."

"That's right," Lindquist said. "Say, you certainly have a wonderful garden here, Peggy. I remember you always wanted a nice garden, with lots of birds and flowers."

"It is lovely," Peggy said. "We're out here all the time." "We?"

"Sir Francis and myself."

"They spend a lot of time together," Robert Nye said. "Cigarette?" He held out his pack to Lindquist. "No?" Nye lit one for himself. "Personally, I can't see anything in ducks, but I never was much on flowers and nature."

"Robert stays indoors and works on his articles," Peggy said. "Sit down, Tommy." She picked up the duck and put him on her lap. "Sit here, beside us."

"Oh, no," Lindquist said. "This is fine."

He became silent, looking down at Peggy and all the flowers, the grass, the silent duck. A faint breeze moved through the rows of iris behind the tree, purple and white iris. No one spoke. The garden was very cool and quiet. Lindquist sighed.

"What is it?" Peggy said.

"You know, all this reminds me of a poem." Lindquist rubbed his forehead. "Something by Yeats, I think."

"Yes, the garden is like that,"

Peggy said. "Very much like poetry."

Lindquist concentrated. "I know!" he said, laughing. "It's you and Sir Francis, of course. You and Sir Francis sitting there. 'Leda and the Swan'."

Peggy frowned. "Do I—"

"The swan was Zeus," Lind-



quist said. "Zeus took the shape of a swan to get near Leda while she was bathing. He—uh—made love to her in the shape of a swan. Helen of Troy was born—because of that, you see. The daughter of Zeus and Leda. How does it go . . . 'A sudden blow: the great wings beating still above the staggering girl'—"

He stopped. Peggy was staring up at him, her face blazing. Suddenly she leaped up, pushing the duck from her path. She was trembling with anger.

"What is it?" Robert said. "What's wrong?"

"How dare you!" Peggy said to Lindquist. She turned and walked off quickly.

Robert ran after her, catching hold of her arm. "But what's the matter? What's wrong? That's just poetry!"

She pulled away. "Let me go."

He had never seen her so angry. Her face had become like ivory, her eyes like two stones. "But Peg—"

She looked up at him. "Robert," she said, "I *am* going to have a baby."

"What!"

She nodded. "I was going to tell you tonight. *He* knows." Her lip curled. "He knows. That's why he said it. Robert, make him leave! Please make him go!"

Nye nodded mechanically.

"Sure, Peg. Sure. But—it's

true? Really true? You're really going to have a baby?" He put his arms around her. "But that's wonderful! Sweetheart, that's marvelous. I never heard anything so marvelous. My golly! For heaven's sake. It's the most marvelous thing I ever heard."

He led her back toward the seat, his arm around her. Suddenly his foot struck something soft, something that leaped and hissed in rage. Sir Francis waddled away, half-flying, his beak snapping in fury.

"Tóm!" Robert shouted. "Listen to this. Listen to something. Can I tell him, Peg? Is it all right?"

Sir Francis hissed furiously after him, but in the excitement no one noticed him, not at all.

It was a boy, and they named him Stephen. Robert Nye drove slowly home from the hospital, deep in thought. Now that he actually had a son his thoughts returned to that day in the garden, that afternoon Tom Lindquist had stopped by. Stopped by and quoted the line of Yeats that had made Peg so angry. There had been an air of cold hostility between himself and Sir Francis, after that. He had never been able to look at Sir Francis quite the same again.

Robert parked the car in front of the house and walked up the

stone steps. Actually, he and Sir Francis had never gotten along, not since the first day they had brought him back from the country. It was Peg's idea from the beginning. She had seen the sign by the farmhouse—

Robert paused at the porch steps. How angry she had been at poor Lindquist. Of course, it was a tactless line to quote, but still . . . He pondered, frowning. How stupid it all was! He and Peg had been married three years. There was no doubt that she loved him, that she was faithful to him. True, they did not have much in common. Peg loved to sit out in the garden, reading or meditating, or feeding the birds. Or playing with Sir Francis.

Robert went around the side of the house, into the back yard, into the garden. Of course she loved him! She loved him and she was loyal to him. It was absurd to think that she might even consider— That Sir Francis might be—

He stopped. Sir Francis was at the far end of the garden, pulling up a worm. As he watched, the white duck gulped down the worm and went on, looking for insects in the grass, bugs and spiders. Suddenly the duck stopped, warily.

Robert crossed the garden. When Peg came back from the

hospital she would be busy with little Stephen. This was the best time, all right. She would have her hands full. Sir Francis would be forgotten. With the baby and all—

"Come here," Robert said. He snatched up the duck. "That's the last worm for you from this garden."

Sir Francis squawked furiously, struggling to get away, pecking frantically. Robert carried him inside the house. He got a suitcase from the closet and put the duck into it. He snapped the lock closed and then wiped his face. What now? The farm? It was only a half hour's drive into the country. But could he find it again?

He could try. He took the suitcase out to the car and dropped it into the back seat. All the way, Sir Francis quacked loudly, first in rage, then later (as they drove along the highway) with growing misery and despair.

Robert said nothing.

Peggy said little about Sir Francis, once she understood that he was gone for good. She seemed to accept his absence, although she stayed unusually quiet for a week or so. But gradually she brightened up again, laughing and playing with little Stephen, taking him out in

the sun to hold on her lap, running her fingers through his soft hair.

"It's just like *down*," Peggy said once. Robert nodded, jarred a little. Was it? More like corn silk, it seemed to him, but he said nothing.

Stephen grew, a healthy, happy baby, warmed by the sun, held in tender, loving arms hour after hour in the quiet garden, under the willow tree. After a few years he had grown into a sweet child, a child with large, dark eyes who played pretty much to himself, away from the other children, sometimes in the garden, sometimes in his room upstairs.

Stephen loved flowers. When the gardener was planting, Stephen went along with him, watching with great seriousness each handful of seeds as they went into the ground, or the poor little bits of plants wrapped in their moss, lowered gently into the warm soil.

He did not talk much. Sometimes Robert stopped his work and watched from the living-room window, his hands in his pockets, smoking and studying the silent child playing by himself among the shrubs and grass. By the time he was five, Stephen was beginning to follow the stories in the great flat books that Peggy brought home to

him. The two of them sat together in the garden, looking at the pictures, tracing the stories.

Robert watched them from the window, moody and silent. He was left out, deserted. How he hated to be on the outside of things! He had wanted a son for so long—

Suddenly doubt assailed him. Again he found himself thinking about Sir Francis and what Tom had said. Angrily, he pushed the thought aside. But the boy was so far from him! Wasn't there any way he could get across to him?

Robert pondered.

One warm fall morning Robert went outdoors and stood by the back porch, breathing the air and looking around him. Peggy had gone to the store to shop and have her hair set. She would not be home for a long time.

Stephen was sitting by himself, at the little low table they had given him for his birthday, coloring pictures with his crayons. He was intent on his work, his small face lined with concentration. Robert walked toward him slowly, across the wet grass.

Stephen looked up, putting down his crayons. He smiled shyly, friendly, watching the man coming toward him. Robert approached the table and

stopped, smiling down, a little uncertain and ill at ease.

"What is it?" Stephen said.

"Do you mind if I join you?"

"No."

Robert rubbed his jaw. "Say, what is it you're doing?" he asked presently.

"Doing?"

"With the crayons."

"I'm drawing." Stephen held his picture up. It showed a great yellow shape, like a lemon. Stephen and he studied it together.

"What is it?" Robert said. "Still life?"

"It's the sun." Stephen put the picture back down and resumed his work. Robert watched him. How skillfully he worked! Now he was sketching in something green. Trees, probably. Maybe someday he would be a great painter. Like Grant Wood. Or Norman Rockwell. Pride stirred inside him.

"That looks good," he said.

"Thank you."

"Do you want to be a painter when you grow up? I used to do some drawing, myself. I did cartooning for the school newspaper. And I designed the emblem for our frat."

There was silence. Did Stephen get his ability from him? He watched the boy, studying his face. He did not look much like him; not at all. Again

doubt filled his mind. Could it really be that— But Peg would never—

"Robert?" the boy said suddenly.

"Yes?"

"Who was Sir Francis?"

Robert staggered. "What? What do you mean! Why do you ask that?"

"I just wondered."

"What do you know about him? Where did you hear the name?"

Stephen went on working for awhile. "I don't know. I think mother mentioned him. Who is he?"

"He's dead," Robert said. "He's been dead for some time. Your mother told you about him?"

"Perhaps it was you," Stephen said. "Somebody mentioned him."

"It wasn't me!"

"Then," Stephen said thoughtfully, "perhaps I dreamed about him. I think perhaps he came to me in a dream and spoke to me. That was it. I saw him in a dream."

"What did he look like?" Robert said, licking his lip nervously, unhappily.

"Like this," Stephen said. He held the picture up, the picture of the sun.

"How do you mean? Yellow?"

"No, he was white. Like the

sun is, at noon. A terribly big white shape in the sky."

"In the sky?"

"He was flying across the sky. Like the sun at noon. All ablaze. In the dream, I mean."

Robert's face twisted, torn by misery and uncertainty. Had she told the child about him? Had she painted a picture for him, an idealized picture? The Duck God. The Great Duck in the Sky, descending all ablaze. Then perhaps it *was* so. Perhaps he was not really the boy's father. Perhaps— It was too much to bear.

"Well, I won't bother you any more." Robert said. He turned away, toward the house.

"Robert?" Stephen said.

"Yes?" He turned quickly.

"Robert, what are you going to do?"

Robert hesitated. "How do you mean, Stephen?"

The boy looked up from his work. His small face was calm and expressionless. "Are you going inside the house?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Robert, in a few minutes I'm going to do something secret. No one knows about it. Not even mother." Stephen hesitated, slyly studying the man's face. "Would—would you want to do it with me?"

"What is it?"

"I'm going to have a party in

the garden here. A secret party. For myself alone."

"You want me to come?"

The boy nodded.

Wild happiness filled up Robert. "You want me to come to your party? It's a secret party? I won't tell anyone. Not even your mother! Of course I'll come." He rubbed his hands together, smiling in a flood of relief. "I'd be glad to come. Do you want me to bring something? Cookies? Cake? Milk? What do you want me to bring?"

"No." Stephen shook his head. "Go inside and wash your hands and I'll make the party ready." He stood up, putting his crayons away in the box. "But you can't tell anyone about it."

"I won't tell anyone," Robert said. "I'll go wash my hands. Thanks, Stephen. Thanks a lot. I'll be right back."

He hurried toward the house, his heart thumping with happiness. Maybe the boy was his after all! A secret party, a private, secret party. And not even Peg knew about it. It was his boy, all right! There was no doubt of that. From now on he would spend time with Stephen, whenever Peg left the house. Tell him stories. How he was in North Africa during the war. Stephen would be interested in that. How he had seen Field

Marshal Montgomery, once. And the German pistol he had picked up. And his photographs.

Robert went inside the house. Peg never let him do that, tell stories to the boy. But he would, by golly! He went to the sink and washed his hands. He grinned. It was his kid, all right.

There was a sound. Peg came into the kitchen with her arms full of groceries. She set them on the table with a sigh. "Hello, Robert," she said. "What are you doing?"

His heart sank. "Home?" he murmured. "So soon? I thought you were going to get your hair fixed."

Peggy smiled, small and pretty in her green dress and hat and high heeled shoes. "I have to go back. I just wanted to bring the groceries home first."

"Then you're leaving again?"

She nodded. "Why? You look so excited. Is something going on? What is it?"

"Nothing," Robert said. He dried his hands. "Nothing at all." He grinned foolishly.

"I'll see you later today," Peggy said. She went back into the livingroom. "Have a good time while I'm gone. Don't let Stephen stay in the garden too long."

"No. No, I won't." Robert waited, listening until he heard the sound of the front door closing. Then he hurried back out

onto the porch and down the steps, into the garden. He hurried through the flowers.

Stephen had cleared off the little low table. The crayons and paper were gone, and in their place were two bowls, each on a plate. A chair was pulled up for him. Stephen watched him come across the grass and toward the table.

"What took you so long?" Stephen said impatiently. "I've already started." He went on eating avidly, his eyes gleaming. "I couldn't wait."

"That's all right," Robert said. "I'm glad you went ahead." He sat down on the little chair eagerly. "Is it good? What is it? Something extra nice?"

Stephen nodded, his mouth full. He went on, helping himself rapidly from his bowl with his hands. Robert looked down at his own plate, grinning.

His grin died. Sickened misery filled his heart. He opened his mouth, but no words came. He pushed his chair back, standing up.

"I don't think I want any," he murmured. He turned away. "I think maybe I'll go back in."

"Why?" Stephen said, surprised, stopping a moment.

"I—I never cared for worms and spiders," Robert said. He went slowly on back, into the house again.

Much Ado About Plenty

BY CHARLES E. FRITCH

ILLUSTRATED BY TYLER

Raspa and Bem were willing to sell the horn cheap because it was so full of anything and everything—elephants and fur coats, for instance. They wanted to get rid of all the junk lying around.

I stared into the gloom. "A corny *what?*"

"Cornucopia," the man in the doorway repeated. "It's a real antique."

"Oh," I said, losing interest.

"You've heard of the Horn of Plenty, haven't you? Well, this is it. I'll give it to you for twenty bucks."

"Plenty is right."

"That's not much, for what you're getting," he insisted.

"We have enough trouble paying for the modern stuff at our house," I confided.

He took hold of my arm. His fingers were lean, and the nails on them were long and sharp. I couldn't see his face, but his eyes were small, like a reptile's, and glistened under his hat.

"Okay, then, fifteen," he said, in a voice like a rusty hinge. "Look what you're getting. A genuine Horn of Plenty. Accord-

ing to legend, you just reach in and get whatever you want—wine, women, song, more women, anything."

"According to legend," I pointed out.

"Sure. But legends usually have some basis, and who knows—"

I shook my head. "No, fifteen bucks is too—"

"Ten, then. Five," he said quickly. "Look, I'll give it to you. Free. How's that?"

"Where would I put it?" I pleaded. "My wife'd disown me if I brought—"

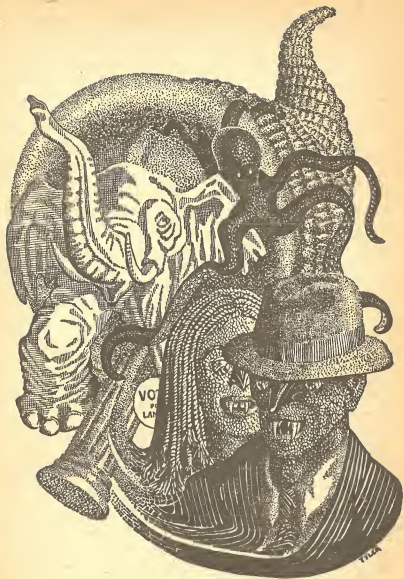
"Make a table lamp out of it," the man suggested. "Give it to your mother-in-law."

"But—"

"Sold," he cried happily.

He thrust it into my arms and then tore off down the street.

"Hey," I yelled after him, "wait—"



But he was out of sight.

I wanted to ask why he was so anxious to get rid of the thing. It didn't weigh much, but it was a bit bulky, something on the order of a giant seashell, a monstrosity five feet long and two feet wide at its opening, with several billion colors flickering irridescently through it. It would be just the kind of thing a husband would bring home and a housekeeping wife would abhor.

"Hey, look what I got," I said proudly, when I got home.

"I give up," Helen said, "what is it—a king size cuspidor?"

"It's a corny—er—cornucopia, that's what, wise guy."

She stared blankly at me. "A what?"

"A cornucopia. C-O-R-N-uh—you know, a Horn of Plenty. You just wish for something, reach in, and bingo, you've got it."

She eyed me suspiciously. "Have you been drinking?"

"Of course not," I said, unruffled by the accusation.

"Just wondering," she said.

"How much did you pay for it?"

"Pay for it?" I said cagily.

"Pay for it," she repeated firmly.

"Nothing."

"W-h-a-t?"

"Nothing," I said, pride in my voice. "This fellow wanted

twenty bucks for it at first, but my knack for salesmanship came in handy and I got it for free."

"Great," she said, in a tone of voice that implied I should have been paid to take it. "Now what will we do with it?"

"It's an antique," I defended. "A real, genuine, honest-to-goodness Horn of Plenty. Just wish for something and out it comes."

She thrust her pretty face near mine. "Let me smell your breath."

"Honest!"

She arched a doubtful eyebrow. "Yeah? Well, pull me out a mink coat."

"Huh?"

"A mink coat."

"Well, after all," I hedged, "it's only a small Horn of Plenty. Wouldn't a mink jacket do?"

"A coat, brother." She pointed at the horn.

I shrugged. "I'll see if they have any in stock." I stuck my head in the horn's opening. "Any mink coats in there?"

"Sure, what color?" a squeaky voice answered.

"What color?" I asked Helen.

"Any color," she said obligingly. "Let's not quibble."

"Okay. Any col—" I began, but the rest came out in a sort of gurgle.

"What are you turning green for?" Helen wanted to know.

"I thought—I thought I heard a voice in there."

"Just an echo, pet," she smiled benignly and pointed again at the horn. "My mink coat, if you please."

I reached in, determined to go down fighting, and felt something soft and furry. I yanked it out. It was a mink coat.

Helen squealed delightedly, grabbed the coat from my weakening grasp, and proceeded to wrap herself in it before a wall mirror.

"Oh, you darling," she cooed. She came over and pecked me on the cheek. "What a delightful surprise."

"Yes, it is, isn't it," I muttered, dazedly. "A surprise, that is."

Hiding it in there was certainly original. For a minute I thought you meant it about that horn of plenty business." She wrinkled her nose prettily. "You're so naive at times."

"Yeah," I said, sitting down. "It *was* a surprise, wasn't it?"

"But—" her face turned sad as she wrapped the coat lovingly about her and looked once more into the mirror—"but you shouldn't have done it. We can't afford to have you buying minks for me."

"Don't worry about that," I said, cheerfully; "There's plenty more where that came from."

Leaping up, I reached into the horn and yanked out another fur coat. Then I fainted.

"This is ridiculous," I was saying when I came to. I was still on the floor and someone was bending over me, putting cold hands on my forehead. "Ridiculous, ridiculous, absolutely, positively, without a doubt, ridiculous."

"That depends on your point of view," a foghorn voice said.

The voice didn't sound anything like Helen's, so I looked up in surprise.

Smiling down at me was a girl who had green scales instead of flesh, a beak for a nose, fangs for teeth, bug-like eyes, and hair that resembled long strands of coarse rope.

She grinned at me and giggled. "You're cute."

"Really," I gasped, turning a little green myself. "You're—er—pretty out of this world yourself."

She blushed greenishly and giggled some more. I seized the opportunity to get up.

"How ya coming?" a squeaky voice asked.

The cornucopia was laying where I had dropped it on the floor. A head was protruding from it. The head had a familiar hat on it and a familiar pair of small, glistening eyes. It was the

character who had given me the cornucopia.

"Hi," the head said. "Remember me?"

"Yeah," I said weakly. "How did you get in there?"

"I sneaked back in while you stopped for a red light."

"Oh," I oh-ed. I jerked a nervous finger at the female. "This a friend of yours?"

"A relative," the head said.

He took off his hat and grinned. He had green scales instead of flesh, a beak for a nose, fangs for teeth, bug-like eyes, and hair that resembled short strands of coarse rope.

I moaned. "Where's Helen?"

"We put her upstairs," the man said. "When you keeled over, Raspa—my sister here—got worried about you and stuck her head out to see what happened. Then your wife let out a screech herself and fainted—from the surprise, no doubt."

"No doubt," I agreed. "It isn't every day you see green faces coming out of cornucopias, you know."

"I suppose not," the other said thoughtfully.

"Now what's all this about?" I wanted to know. "This cornucopia business, and why did you give it to me?"

"Wait'll I get comfy," he said, "and I'll tell all."

He clambered from the horn,

and he and Raspa helped me to the couch, where the three of us sat in a cozy semi-circle. I avoided looking at Raspa. Not because she was any worse-looking than her brother, but because she kept sighing like a furnace and giggling and flirtatiously rolling her bug-eyes in my direction. She sat real close and blushed and ran her heavily-nailed fingers across my scalp.

"You're cute," she said, frowning concernedly at the imperfection, "but you've got dandruff."

"Have you taken a bath this year?" I countered.

The frown deepened. "What's a bath, Bem?" she asked her brother.

Bem shrugged. "Some kind of Earth compliment, I suppose. Humans are always saying pretty things to their females."

Raspa giggled.

"About the cornucopia—" I prompted.

"Oh, yes," he said, "that. Well, first of all, my name is Bem and this is Raspa, my sister, and we live in the Land of Plenty, which is six or seven dimensions away, depending on which route you take to get there."

"Everything is plentiful there," Raspa squeaked in. "Most everything, that is," she added, gazing at me like a dog does a meatball.

"What Raspa means," Bem explained, "is that everything in Plenty multiplies so swiftly that if we didn't keep giving things away we'd be crowded off our dimension in no time.

"There's one thing we're deficient in, though," he went on sadly. "Men. For the past few billions of years the males of Plenty have worked hard trying to get rid of all the stuff cluttering up the place; it was easier in the old days when people believed in Cornucopias. Now, our people wear out in only a few years, and we're not reproducing ourselves."

"You must have a pretty hard time," I said, "with only one cornucopia."

"Oh, there are lots of others," Bem said, "all over the world. The trouble is, a person has to want something before we can give it to him. Unfortunately, there's no law of supply and demand operating, and everything multiplies at the same rate, including the things nobody ever asks for.

"Take elephants, for example," he continued. "We get rid of a few in India each year and sometimes a zoo or a circus will take one or two off our hands—but there just isn't any demand for elephants these days."

He looked at me hopefully. "Would you—"

"No, thanks," I said hastily.

"See what I mean," he said, his bug-eyes drooping sadly; "we got problems. We've got not only Plenty, we've got too much of everything."

"Except eligible males," Raspa sighed in my direction.

"You must have a lot of elephants," I said, wishing to steer clear of certain subjects.

"Plenty," Bem moaned. "And not only elephants, but octopi, pile drivers, Landon buttons, sand dunes, and wooden nickels—to mention a few. Nobody wants them, so they keep piling up on us."

"I see," I saw. "And you gave me the horn to unload a few of your trinkets on me, is that it?"

Bem hesitated. "Not exactly." He glanced a bit nervously at Raspa, who was busy snuggling up to me, and went on: "You see, several thousand of us inhabit this particular section of Plenty and are responsible for all the items in it. Every other cornucopia is a sort of doorway between your world and a certain section of Plenty, and each section tries to get rid of as much as possible through its particular cornucopia. If there isn't a certain item in one section, we can put in a requisition for it from another."

"I'll be damned if I'll take any

of your elephants," I told him, "no matter how many you've got. That goes for sand dunes and wooden nickels, too."

"Oh, no," Bem assured me quickly. "You were chosen because Raspa needs a husband."

"W-h-a-t!"

Raspa giggled shyly.

"I don't know myself what she sees in a pink creature like you with—" he shuddered—"with flat eyeballs, but women will be women, I suppose. As I said before, we need men, and—"

"Now wait a minute," I told him, as an unexpected light dawned. "You mean you—you want to cart me off to some other dimension for—for mating purposes!"

"Well," Bem said, somewhat petulantly, "that's putting it rather crudely, but—"

"No," I said. "No, no, no, no, no!"

"We thought new blood might be what is needed, and you look as though you might have some," Bem said, choosing to ignore my outburst. "You can have anything and everything in Plenty you want. What do you say?"

"I've already said what I saw," I told him. "The answer—"

Bem smiled fangily. "You two will make a lovely couple."

"Darling," Raspa cooed, "crushing me to her."

"Now let's not be hasty," I cried out with a remaining fragment of breath. "I'm already married."

Raspa released me, and a tear, appearing in one of her bug-eyes, rolled disconsolately down her scaly cheek.

"That's right," she said. "I'd forgotten."

I patted her on the head. "Well, tough luck, Raspa old kid. We can't all be lucky. See you around."

I got up. Bem pulled me back down.

"Let's talk this over," he insisted.

"Look, Bem, be a good fellow, will you. I'm happily married. There are lots of other handsome red-blooded American boys in this world. Raspa wouldn't like me at all. I'm an old grouch. I spill ashes on the rugs. I eat crackers in bed and snore all night."

I placed a fatherly hand on his shoulder and went on, my voice throbbing with emotion. "She needs one of her own kind, Bem. Someone to comfort her in her times of stress. Someone to love her. Someone who'll stay by her side through better and for worse. For richer, for poorer. When she's in sickness and

in health. Till death do they part."

I bowed my head reverently, and out of the corner of my eye I saw Bem's bug-eyes moisten.

"What a tender thought," he sniffed. "But," he added gruffly, and the moisture evaporated, "that doesn't alter facts. We need males in Plenty, and you're a male." He leaned forward, his scaly face suddenly disturbed. "Do you realize that while we're sitting here talking, millions of items have been pouring into Plenty. We need action, and I'm afraid we're desperate enough to take you there by force if we have to."

I gulped. "Couldn't—couldn't I have a little time to think this over?"

"Well," Bem considered, "we don't want to seem unfair, but—All right. Five minutes, then. C'mon, Raspa." He got up and put his feet into the horn and slithered in until only his head and shoulders were visible. He turned and wiggled a warning finger at me. "Remember, if you don't come along peacefully, we'll have to force you. That wouldn't be pleasant."

He disappeared, and Raspa followed him. She fluttered her hand at me and giggled. I shuddered.

Now what? I wondered. For a minute I sat there on the sofa,

and then I suddenly realized that even a minute was too much time to spend inactive. Five minutes, Bem had said. I wondered when the next boat was leaving for South America.

"Who were you talking to?" Helen said, coming into the room. She had a puzzled look on her face and half a ham sandwich in her hand.

"A couple of green people," I told her.

Helen's mouth formed a round "Oh." She went on, "You know, I had the funniest dream. I dreamed you brought home that—that seashell or whatever it is, and pulled a mink coat out of it. Isn't that funny?"

"Hilarious," I said.

"And then an awful green creature stuck its head out and—" She stopped, surprised at the statement. "Did—did you say something before about—about—"

"Green people? Unfortunately, yes." I told her what had happened. "And they're coming back after me in five minutes when I have my toothbrush packed." I moaned. "Why do I have to be so irresistible to women?"

"Maybe she likes you because your complexions are similar," Helen suggested.

"Very, very funny. But that guy Bem means business. He

meant it when he said he'll come back later."

"We'll think of something," Helen said, patting my hand confidently.

"Sure, we will," I said, but my smile was wan. "We better."

"Most people would want a horn of plenty," Helen mused, "but with all the trouble this one's kicking up, I'd just as soon have plenty of nothing."

"Me, too," I agreed heartily. "I can't understand it; with all the people in the world, why did I have to be picked for—say!"

"What's the matter?"

"Helen, you sweet, darling, gorgeous, wonderful girl." I hugged her and planted a big juicy kiss on her forehead. "I love you, ya hear me, I love you."

She arched a puzzled eyebrow. "Think nothing of it."

"I will," I cried gleefully.

"W-h-a-t?"

"Bem," I shouted, hopping up and down in joy. "Bem, come here."

Bem appeared, his hat tilted at a rakish angle. "Yeah?" He tipped his hat, and Helen weakly nodded acknowledgment and muttered something about wishing she hadn't eaten that ham sandwich.

"You said before that there were more Horns of Plenty, didn't you?"

"Ye-es," Bem admitted.

"And that each horn controls a certain part of Plenty?"

"Ye-es."

"And that with all the Horns together you had everything in Plenty, is that right?"

"Ye-es."

"Well, then—" Triumphantly, I bent over and whispered into his green, pointed ear.

For a moment he sat very still, considering it, and then he took off his hat and scratched his scaly head with a long-nailed finger. "Never thought of that. Wait, I'll check with the central office."

The head disappeared.

"What is it?" Helen said.

I smiled mysteriously. "You'll see."

Bem reappeared. "Yep, there is one," he reported enthusiastically. "The central office didn't even know about it. It's in that unexplored section in the eighth dimension."

"Where's the cornucopia that leads to it?" I asked eagerly.

"Out in Timbuctu. Some old prospector's got it. Would you believe it, he's using it as—"

"Can you get it?" I interrupted.

Bem shrugged. He pulled a map from his pocket and unfolded it.

"Let's see now, if I take the shortcut across the fifth dimen-

sion," he mused. "Yeah, I guess so. See you later."

Bem's head reappeared. "I got it," he said.

He stepped into the room dragging another cornucopia with him. Don't ask me how he got it through the opening. How did they get elephants out?

"Why, it's just like the other one," Helen exclaimed.

"Not quite," I told her. "At least it better not be! This one is loaded with nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Sure," I said happily. "That remark you made about plenty of nothing set me thinking. If there was plenty of everything in the Land of Plenty, why wouldn't there be a cornucopia in which there was Plenty of Room?"

"For goodness sake," Helen said, amazed at my genius.

"Yeah," Bem said. "This prospector in Timbuctu had it in a shed in back of his cabin. Would you believe it, he was actually using it as a—"

"We better hurry," I suggested. "Look, Bem, you get back in the horn and I'll wish for everything in Plenty and then hold the horns together. Then you and your relatives just keep tossing things out—elephants included—and they'll go into the other cornucopia just as long as you keep tossing them."

"I hope it works," Bem said. "If not, I'll be back—with Raspa!"

But it did work, evidently, for Bem didn't come back. He was probably too busy tossing away unwanted octopi, butternut trees, white pillars, pile drivers, Landon buttons, sand dunes, and wooden nickels—to mention a few. Besides, Helen and I tied the shells together, glued the edges, plastered it with tape, and later had it welded.

We have the cornucopia resting now on our mantle, and everything is peaceful—except on those occasions when some near-sighted Plentian misses his mark and an elephant bangs into the side of the Horn.

Every once in awhile, though, I start wishing I had taken certain little items from the cornucopia before we sealed it up—little things that come in handy at times, like money and stuff. Once Helen, seeing this look of longing on my face, misinterpreted it.

"You're not sorry, are you?" she asked me, trying to look worried. "After all, Raspa was quite an attractive girl."

I shook my head. "'Course not," I assured her. "I like the mature, sophisticated, experienced type of woman. Raspa was too green."

THE FROST-GIANT'S DAUGHTER

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

EDITED BY L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

A hitherto unpublished fantasy from the life of Conan the Cimmerian. Here, for the last time in an original story, the barbarian hero stalks through the strange, magic-ridden lands of the Hyperborean Age.

The clangor of sword and ax had died away; the shouting of the slaughter was hushed. Silence lay on the red-stained snow. The bleak pale sun glittered blindingly from ice-fields and snow-covered plains; it struck sheens of silver from rent corselet and broken blade where the dead lay as they had fallen. The nerveless hand yet grasped the broken hilt. Helmeted heads were drawn back in their death-throes, tilting beards of red and gold skyward as if in a last invocation to Ymir the frost-giant, god of a warrior-race.

Across the reddened drifts and the mail-clad forms, two figures glared at each other. In all that utter desolation they alone moved. The frosty deep-blue sky was over them, the vast

white plain around them, the dead men at their feet. Slowly through the corpses they had come, as ghosts might come to a tryst through the shambles of a dead world. In the brooding silence they stood face to face.

Both were tall men, built as powerfully as tigers. Their shields were gone, their corselets battered and dented. Blood had dried or frozen on their mail; their swords were stained red to the hilts. Their helmets, once horned but with the horns now knocked off, showed the marks of fierce strokes. One was beardless and black-maned; the locks and beard of the other were red as the blood on the sunlit snow.

"Man," said this last, "tell me your name, that my brothers in Vanaheim shall know who

was the last of Wulfhere's band of wolves to fall before the sword of Heimdulf."

"Not in Vanaheim," growled the black-haired warrior, "but in Valhalla shall you tell your brothers that you met Conan of Cimmeria!"

Heimdulf roared and leaped, his sword flashing in a deadly arc. At the same instant Conan thrust forward in a long lunge with all the power of his broad shoulders behind the blade. The Vanaheimer's singing blade crashed on Conan's helmet, staggering him and filling his vision with red sparks, but at the same instant his own sharp point tore through brass scales and bones and heart, and the red-haired warrior died at Conan's feet, the fragments of his sword, shivered into bits of blue fire, falling into the snow around him.

The Cimmerian stood upright, trailing his sword, a sudden sick weariness assailing him. The glare of the sun on the snow cut his eyes like a knife, and the sky seemed shrunken and strangely apart. He turned away from the trampled expanse where yellow-bearded warriors lay locked with red-haired slayers in the embrace of death. A few steps he took, and the glare of the snow-fields was suddenly dimmed. He sank down into the snow, sup-

porting himself on one mailed arm, seeking to shake the blindness out of his eyes as a lion might shake his mane.

A silvery laugh cut through his dizziness. His sight slowly cleared as he looked up. There was an indefinable strangeness about the landscape—an unfamiliar tinge to earth and sky, but he did not think long of this.

Before him, swaying like a sapling, stood a woman. To his dazed eyes her body was like the ivory of those great shaggy beasts of the elephant tribe which, it was said, lived east of the land of the Hyperboreans. Save for a light veil of gossamer she was naked as the day. Her slender bare feet were whiter than the snow on which they stood. She laughed down at the bewildered warrior with a laughter sweeter than the rippling of silvery fountains and poisonous with a cruel mockery.

The Cimmerian asked: "Who are you? Whence come you?"

"What matter?" Her voice was as musical as a silver-stringed harp, but edged with cruelty.

"Call up your men," said he, grasping his sword. "Though my strength fail, yet shall they never take me alive. I see that you are of the Vanir."

"Have I said so?"

His gaze went again to her hair, which he had thought red; now he saw that it was neither red nor yellow but a glorious compound of the two. The sun struck it so dazzlingly that he could hardly look upon it. Her eyes were neither blue nor gray, but of shifting colors and dancing lights and clouds of colors that he could not have named. Her full red lips smiled, and from her feet to her blinding crown of hair her body was as perfect as the dream of a god. Conan's pulse hammered in his temples.

"I cannot tell," he muttered, "whether you are of Vanaheim and my enemy, or of Asgard and my friend. Far have I wandered, but a woman like you I have never seen, not even among the fairest daughters of the AEsir. By Ymir—"

"Who are you to swear by Ymir?" she mocked. "What know you of the gods of ice and snow, you have come up from the South to adventure?"

"By the dark Crom of my own race!" he cried in anger. "Though I'm not of the golden-haired AEsir, none has been more forward in sword-play! This day have I seen fourscore men fall, and I alone have survived the field where Wulfhere's reavers met the wolves of Bragi. Tell me, woman, have you seen

the flash of mail out across the snow-plains, or seen armed men moving upon the ice?"

"I have seen the hoar-frost glittering in the sun," she answered. "I have heard the wind whispering across the everlasting snows."

He shook his head with a sigh. "Niord should have come up with us before the battle joined. I fear he has been ambushed, and now Wulfhere and his men lie dead . . . I had thought there was no village near this spot, but you cannot have come far over these snows naked. Lead me to your tribe, if you are of Asgard, for I am faint with blows and the weariness of strife."

She laughed. "My village is farther than even you can walk, Conan of Cimmeria." Spreading her arms she swayed before him, her golden head lolling sensuously and her shining eyes half shadowed beneath their long lashes. "Am I not beautiful?"

"Like Dawn running naked on the snows," he muttered, his eyes burning like those of a wolf.

"Then why do you not rise and follow me? Who's this strong warrior who falls down before me? Lie down and die with the other fools, Conan of the black

hair. You cannot follow whither I lead!"

With an oath the Cimmerian heaved himself on to his feet, his blue eyes blazing, his dark scarred face contorted. Rage shook his soul, but desire for the taunting figure before him hammered at his temples and drove his blood fiercely through his veins. Earth and sky swam red to his dizzy gaze. In his madness of passion, fatigue and faintness were swept away.

He spoke no word as he sheathed his bloody sword and drove at her, fingers spread to grip her soft flesh. With a shriek of laughter she leaped back and ran. Conan followed with a growl, forgetting the battle, the dead, and the absent Niord and his band. He thought of nothing but the slender shape that floated before him.

Out across the blinding-white plain the chase led, toward the low hills that broke the horizon to the north, the girl laughing back at Conan over her white shoulder. The trampled red field fell out of sight behind, but still Conan kept on. His mailed feet broke through the frozen crust; he plowed thigh-deep through drifts by sheer brute strength. But the girl danced ahead lightly as a feather, her feet barely leaving their imprint on the hoar-frost that overlaid the

crust. Despite the fire in his veins, the cold bit through the adventurer's fur-lined tunic and trews, but the girl in her gossamer wisp ran as lightly and gaily as if she danced through the palms and rose-gardens of Poitain.

On and on she led. Conan followed. Black curses rolled from his parched lips; the veins in his temples swelled, and his teeth gnashed.

"You shan't escape me!" he roared. "Lead me into a trap and I'll pile your kinsmen's heads at your feet! Hide from me and I'll tear the mountains apart to find you! I'll follow you to Hell itself!"

Foam flew from the barbarian's lips as her maddening laughter floated back to him. As the hours passed and the sun slid down its long slant to the horizon, the wide plain gave way to low hills marching upward in broken ranges. As he panted up over the crests of the swells he glimpsed towering mountains farther north, their eternal snows blue with distance and pink in the rays of the blood-red setting sun. In the darkling sky above them shone the flaring rays of the aurora, spread fan-wise into the sky, frosty blades of cold flaming light, growing and brightening and changing

in color, brighter than Conan had ever seen it.

The skies glowed and crackled with strange lights and gleams. The snow shone weirdly, icy crimson in the sunlight, frosty blue in the shadows. Conan plunged doggedly ahead through a crystalline realm of enchantment where the only reality was the white body dancing across the snow beyond his reach.

Then two gigantic figures rose up to bar his way.

Though Conan was a head taller than most men, these were taller than he. The scales of their mail were covered with frost; their helmets and the helms of their axes were sheathed in ice. Snow sprinkled their locks. Their beards bristled with spiky icicles; their eyes were as cold as the lights that streamed above them.

The girl danced between them, crying: "Brothers! Look who follows! I have brought you a man to slay. Take his heart that we may lay it smoking on our father's board!"

The giants answered with roars like the grinding of icebergs on a frozen shore and heaved up their axes, shining in the starlight, as the maddened Cimmerian hurled himself upon them. As the nearest frosty blade flashed down Conan threw

himself desperately to one side. The ax-head hissed past his eyes, blinding him with its brightness, and before the giant could raise his ax again Conan gave back a terrible back-handed stroke that sheared clear through his foe's right leg at the knee.

With a groan the victim fell, toppling like a tall tree, and at the same instant Conan was dashed to the snow, his left shoulder numb from a glancing blow of the survivor's ax. Only the Cimmerian's heavy mail had barely saved his arm and his life. Conan saw the remaining giant looming above him like a colossus of ice against the stars. The ax fell—to sink deep into snow and frozen earth as Conan hurled himself aside and bounded to his feet. The giant roared and wrenched his ax free, but even as he did, Conan's sword sang down. The giant's knees bent as he sank slowly into the snow, which crimsoned with the blood that gushed bubbling from his half-severed neck.

Conan looked up to see the girl standing a short distance away, staring at him in wide-eyed horror, all mockery gone from her face.

Drops of blood flew from his sword as his hand shook with passion. "Call the rest of your dog-brothers!" he cried "I'll give

their hearts to the wolves! You cannot escape me . . ."

With a cry of fright she turned and fled, no longer mocking him over her shoulder, but running for life. Conan strained after her until the darkening snow swam red to his gaze, but she drew ahead, dwindling in the witch-fires of the twilit sky until she was but a dim blur in the distance. Still Conan reeled on, grinding his teeth, until he saw the blur grow to a dancing white flame again, and after a while she was running less than a hundred paces ahead of him. The space narrowed foot by foot.

Now he heard her quick pants as she ran with effort, her golden locks trailing, and he saw a flash of fear in the look that she cast back over her shoulder. The grim endurance of the barbarian had served him well. The speed ebbed from her flashing white legs; she reeled. In Conan's untamed soul leaped up the fires of Hell that she had fanned. With an inhuman roar he closed in on her, just as she wheeled and flung out fending arms with a cry.

He dropped his sword and crushed her to him. Her body bent back as she fought with frenzy in his iron arms. Her golden hair blinded him as his fingers sank into her smooth flesh—flesh as cold as ice. She

writhed her head aside, striving to avoid the fierce kisses that bruised her flesh.

"You're cold as the snow," he mumbled thickly. "I'll warm you with the fire of my blood . . ."

With a scream and a wrench of inhuman strength she writhed out of his grasp, leaving her gossamer garment in his hands. She sprang back, her hair in wild disarray, her bare white bosom heaving. For an instant Conan stood frozen, awed by her terrible beauty.

She flung her arms towards the lights that glowed in the skies and screamed: "Ymir! Father! Save me!"

Conan was leaping forward, arms spread, when the skies sprang into icy fire with a crack like that of a cleaving glacier. The girl's body was enveloped in a cold blue flame so bright that the Cimmerian covered his eyes with his hands. Skies and snowy hills were bathed in crackling flames, white, blue, and crimson. And Conan staggered and cried out.

The girl was gone.

The glowing snow lay empty and bare. In the sky the witch-lights flashed and played, and among the distant mountains there sounded a rolling thunder as of a gigantic war-chariot rushing behind frantic steeds.

The aurora, the hills, and the

blazing heavens reeled drunkenly to Conan's sight, fire-balls burst with showers of sparks, and the sky became a gigantic wheel which rained stars as it spun. Under his feet the snowy hills heaved, and the Cimmerian crumpled into the snows to lie still.

In a cold dark universe, whose sun had died eons ago, Conan felt the movement of life. An earthquake was shaking him to and fro, at the same time chafing his hands and feet until he yelled with pain and fury and groped for his sword.

"He is coming to, Horsa," said a voice. "Hasten—we must rub the frost out of his limbs if he's ever to wield sword again."

"He'll not open his left hand," growled another.

Conan opened his eyes and stared into the bearded faces. He was surrounded by tall golden-haired warriors in mail and furs.

"Conan!" said one. "You live!"

"By Crom, Niord," said the Cimmerian. "Do I truly live, or are we all dead and in Valhalla?"

"We live," grunted the As, busy over Conan's half-frozen feet. "We had to hew our way through an ambush, or we had come up with you ere the battle was joined. The corpses were

scarce cold when we came upon the field. Not finding you among the dead we followed your spoor. In Ymir's name, Conan, why wandered you off into the wastes of the North? We have followed your tracks for hours. Had a blizzard come up and hidden them we had never found you!"

"Swear not by Ymir," a man muttered, glancing at the distant mountains. "This is his land. Legends say the god bides among yonder peaks."

Conan answered hazily: "I saw a woman . . . We met Bragi's men in the plain and fought—I know not how long. I alone lived, but dizzy and faint from the battering. The land lay like a dream before me, and the woman came and flouted me. She was beautiful as a frozen flame from Hell. A madness fell upon me when I looked at her so I forgot all else in the world. I followed her. Found you not her tracks? Or the giants in icy mail whom I slew?"

Niord shook his head. "We found only your tracks in the snow."

"Then it may be that I'm mad. Yet you yourself seem no more real than was the golden-haired witch who fled naked across the snows before me. And still, she vanished under my very hands like a blown-out flame."

"He's raving," whispered a warrior.

"Not so!" cried an older man with wild weird eyes. "It was Atali, daughter of Ymir the frost-giant! To fields of the dead she comes and shows herself to the dying. When a boy I saw her as I lay half slain upon the bloody field of Wolfraven. I saw her walk among the dead, her body like ivory and her hair bright in the moonlight. I lay and howled like a dying dog because I couldn't crawl after her. She lures men from stricken fields into the wastelands to be slain by her brothers, the ice-giants, as sacrifices to her father. The Cimmerian has

seen Atali, the frost-giant's daughter!"

"Bah!" said Horsa. "Gormr's mind was touched in youth by a sword-cut on the head. Look how Conan's helmet is dented. Any of those blows might have addled his brain. He followed a vision of delirium. He's from the South; what knows he of Atali?"

"Perhaps, perhaps," muttered Conan. "It was all strange and weird— By Crom!"

He broke off, staring at that which dangled from his left fist, which he slowly and painfully unclenched. The others gaped silently at the veil he held up—a wisp of gossamer never spun by human distaff.

GNOME PRESS has just issued another book in its worthy efforts to get the whole saga of Conan in hard covers. This one is entitled CONAN THE KING, and deals with the later life of the Cimmerian hero. It also contains some of the best of Howard's writing, and should be listed as a real bargain at its price of three dollars.

There are five stories, including TREASURE OF TRANCOS—which was published in our first issue as THE BLACK STRANGER. We'd like to concentrate on one of those stories however, since that alone is worth the price of the book.

To our mind THE SCARLET CITADEL is the best story Robert E. Howard ever wrote—and also the best story of adventure and magic that ever mixed the two. It was the story which first started our own interest in fantasy—and it stands up today as strongly as ever.

Even those who feel they don't like Howard's stories will find this a rewarding experience!



A STRAY FROM CATHAY

BY JOHN WYNDHAM

ILLUSTRATED BY EBERLE

When Hwyl and Bronwen began wagging their dragon from China around the community, Idris objected, as a good iconoclast should. Such a monster had no place in Wales. The only dragon permissible, of course, was a good Welsh dragon!

The parcel, waiting provocatively on the dresser, was the first thing that Hwyl noticed when he got in from work.

"From Dai, is it?" he inquired of his wife.



"Yes, indeed. Japanese the stamps are," she told him.

He went across to examine it. It was the shape a small hat-box might be, about ten inches each way, perhaps. The address: Mr. and Mrs. Hwyl Hughes, Ty Derwen, Llynllawn, Llangolwg-coch, Brecknockshire, S. Wales, was lettered carefully, for the clear understanding of foreigners. The other label, also hand-lettered, but in red, was quite clear, too. It said: EGGS—Fragile—With great CARE.

"There is funny to send eggs so far," Hwyl said. "Plenty of eggs we are having. Might be chocolate eggs, I think?"

"Come you to your tea, man," Bronwen told him. "All day I have been looking at that old parcel, and a little longer it can wait now."

Hwyl sat down at the table and began his meal. From time to time, however, his eyes strayed again to the parcel.

"If it is real eggs they are, careful you should be," he remarked. "Reading in a book I was once how in China they keep eggs for years. Bury them in the earth, they do, for a delicacy. There is strange for you, now. Queer they are in China, and not like Wales, at all."

Bronwen contented herself with saying that perhaps Japan was not like China, either.

When the meal had been finished and cleared, the parcel was transferred to the table. Hwyl snipped the string and pulled off the brown paper. Within was a tin box which, when the sticky tape holding its lid had been removed, proved to be full to the brim with sawdust. Mrs. Hughes fetched a sheet of newspaper, and prudently covered the table-top. Hwyl dug his fingers into the sawdust.

"Something there, there is," he announced.

"There is stupid you are. Of course there is something there," Bronwen said, slapping his hand out of the way.

She trickled some of the sawdust out on to the newspaper, and then felt inside the box herself. Whatever it was, it felt much too large for an egg. She poured out more sawdust and felt again. This time, her fingers encountered a piece of paper. She pulled it out and laid it on the table; a letter in Dafydd's handwriting. Then she put in her hand once more, got her fingers under the object, and lifted it gently out.

"Well, indeed! Look at that now! Did you ever?" she exclaimed. "Eggs, he was saying, is it?"

They both regarded it with astonishment for some moments.

"So big it is. Queer, too," said Hwyl, at last.

"What kind of bird to lay such an egg?" said Bronwen.

"Ostrich, perhaps?" suggested Hwyl.

But Bronwen shook her head. She had once seen an ostrich's egg in a museum, and remembered it well enough to know that it had little in common with this. The ostrich's egg had been a little smaller, with a dull, sallow-looking, slightly dimpled surface. This was smooth and shiny, and by no means had the same dead look: it had a lustre to it, a nacreous kind of beauty.

"A pearl, could it be?" she said, in an awed voice.

"There is silly you are," said her husband. "From an oyster as big as Llangolwgcoch Town-Hall, you are thinking?"

He burrowed into the tin again, but 'Eggs', it seemed, had been a manner of speaking: there was no other, nor room for one.

Bronwen put some of the sawdust into one of her best vegetable-dishes, and bedded the egg carefully on top of it. Then they sat down to read their son's letter:

S. S. Tudor Maid,
Kobe.

Dear Mam and Dad,

I expect you will be surprised

about the enclosed I was too. It is a funny looking thing I expect they have funny birds in China after all they have Pandas so why not. We found a small sampan about a hundred miles off the China coast that had bust its mast and should never have tried and all except two of them were dead they are all dead now. But one of them that wasn't dead then was holding this egg-thing all wrapped up in a padded coat like it was a baby only I didn't know it was an egg then not till later. One of them died coming aboard but this other one lasted two days longer in spite of all I could do for him which was my best. I was sorry nobody here can speak Chinese because he was a nice little chap and lonely and knew he was a goner but there it is. And when he saw it was nearly all up he gave me this egg and talked very faint but I'd not have understood anyway. All I could do was take it and hold it careful the way he had and tell him I'd look after it which he couldn't understand either. Then he said something else and looked very worried and died poor chap.

So here it is. I know it is an egg because when I took him a boiled egg once he pointed to both of them to show me but nobody on board knows what kind of egg. But seeing I promised

him I'd keep it safe I am sending it to you to keep for me as this ship is no place to keep anything safe anyway and hope it doesn't get cracked on the way too.

Hoping this finds you as it leaves me and love to all and you special.

Dai.

"Well, there is strange for you, now," said Mrs. Hughes, as she finished reading. "And looking like an egg it is, indeed—the shape of it," she conceded. "But the colors are not. There is pretty they are. Like you see when oil is on the road in the rain. But never an egg like that have I seen in my life. Flat the color is on eggs, and not to shine."

Hwyl went on looking at it thoughtfully.

"Yes. There is beautiful," he agreed, "but what use?"

"Use, is it, indeed!" said his wife. "A trust, it is, and sacred, too. Dying the poor man was, and our Dai gave him his word. I am thinking of how we will keep it safe for him till he will be back, now."

They both contemplated the egg awhile.

"Very far away, China is," Bronwen remarked, obscurely.

Several days passed, however, before the egg was removed

from display on the dresser. Word quickly went round the valley about it, and the callers would have felt slighted had they been unable to see it. Bronwen felt that continually getting it out and putting it away again would be more hazardous than leaving it on exhibition.

Almost everyone found the sight of it rewarding. Idris Bowen who lived three houses away was practically alone in his divergent view.

"The shape of an egg, it has," he allowed. "But careful you should be, Mrs. Hughes. A fertility symbol it is, I am thinking, and stolen, too, likely."

"Mr. Bowen—" began Bronwen, indignantly.

"Oh, by the men in that boat, Mrs. Hughes. Refugees from China they would be, see. Traitors to the Chinese people. And running away with all they could carry, before the glorious army of the workers and peasants could catch them, too. Always the same, it is, as you will be seeing when the revolution comes to Wales."

"Oh, dear, dear! There is funny you are, Mr. Bowen. Propaganda you will make out of an old boot, I think," said Bronwen.

Idris Bowen frowned.

"Funny, I am not, Mrs.

Hughes. And propaganda there is in an honest boot, too," he told her as he left with dignity.

By the end of a week practically everyone in the village had seen the egg and been told no, Mrs. Hughes did not know what kind of a creature had laid it, and the time seemed to have come to store it away safely against Dafydd's return. There were not many places in the house where she could feel sure that it would rest undisturbed, but, on consideration, the airing-cupboard seemed as likely as any, so she put it back on what sawdust was left in the tin, and stowed it in there.

It remained there for a month, out of sight, and pretty much out of mind until a day when Hwyl returning from work discovered his wife sitting at the table with a disconsolate expression on her face, and a bandage on her finger. She looked relieved to see him.

"Hatched, it is," she observed.

The blankness of Hwyl's expression was irritating to one who had had a single subject on her mind all day.

"Dai's egg," she explained. "Hatched out, it is, I am telling you."

"Well, there is a thing for

you, now!" said Hwyl. "A nice little chicken, is it?"

"A chicken it is not, at all. A monster, indeed, and biting me it is, too." She held out her bandaged finger.

She explained that this morning she had gone to the airing-cupboard to take out a clean towel, and as she put her hand in, something had nipped her finger, painfully. At first she had thought that it might be a rat that had somehow got in from the yard, but then she had noticed that the lid was off the tin, and the shell of the egg there was all broken to pieces.

"How is it to see?" Hwyl asked.

Bronwen admitted that she had not seen it well. She had had a glimpse of a long, greeny-blue tail protruding from behind a pile of sheets, and then it had looked at her over the top of them, glaring at her from red eyes. On that, it had seemed to her more the kind of a job a man should deal with, so she had slammed the door, and gone to bandage her finger.

"Still there, then, is it?" said Hwyl.

She nodded.

"Right you. Have a look at it, we will, now then," he said, decisively.

He started to leave the room, but on second thoughts turned

back to collect a pair of heavy working-gloves. Bronwen did not offer to accompany him.

Presently there was a scuffle of his feet, an exclamation or two, then his tread descending the stairs. He came in, shutting the door behind him with his foot. He set the creature he was carrying down on the table, and for some seconds it crouched there, blinking, but otherwise unmoving.

"Scared, he was, I think," Hwyl remarked.

In the body, the creature bore some resemblance to a lizard—a large lizard, over a foot long. The scales of its skin, however, were much bigger, and some of them curled up and stood out here and there, in a fin-like manner. And the head was quite unlike a lizard's, being much rounder, with a wide mouth, broad nostrils, and, overall, a slightly pushed-in effect, in which were set a pair of goggling red eyes. About the neck, and also making a kind of mane, were curious, streamer-like attachments with the suggestion of locks of hair which had permanently cohered. The color was mainly green, shot with blue, and having a metallic shine to it, but there were brilliant red markings about the head and in the lower parts of the locks. There were touches of red, too,

where the legs joined the body, and on the feet, where the toes finished in sharp yellow claws. Altogether, a surprisingly vivid and exotic creature.

It eyed Bronwen Hughes for a moment, turned a baleful look on Hwyl, and then started to run about the table-top, looking for a way off. The Hughes watched it for a moment or two, and then regarded one another.

"Well, there is nasty for you, indeed," observed Bronwen.

"Nasty it may be. But beautiful it is, too, look," said Hwyl.

"Ugly old face to have," Bronwen remarked.

"Yes, indeed. But fine colors, too, see. Glorious, they are, like technicolor, I am thinking," Hwyl said.

The creature appeared to have half a mind to leap from the table. Hwyl leaned forward and caught hold of it. It wriggled, and tried to get its head round to bite him, but discovered he was holding it too near the neck for that. It paused in its struggles. Then, suddenly, it snorted. Two jets of flame and a puff of smoke came from its nostrils. Hwyl dropped it abruptly, partly from alarm, but more from surprise. Bronwen gave a squeal, and climbed hastily on to her chair.

The creature itself seemed a trifle astonished. For a few sec-

onds it stood turning its head and waving the sinuous tail that was quite as long as its body. Then it scuttled across to the hearthrug, and curled itself up in front of the fire.

"By dammo! There was a thing for you!" Hwyl exclaimed, regarding it a trifle nervously. "Fire there was with it, I think. I will like to understand that, now."

"Fire indeed, and smoke, too," Bronwen agreed. "There is shocking it was, and not natural, at all."

She looked uncertainly at the creature. It had so obviously settled itself for a nap that she risked stepping down from the chair, but she kept on watching it, ready to jump up again if it should move. Then:

"Never did I think I will see one of those. And not sure it is right to have in the house, either," she said.

"What is it you are meaning, now?" Hwyl asked, puzzled.

"Why, a dragon, indeed," Bronwen told him.

"Dragon!" he exclaimed. "There is foolish—" Then he stopped. He looked at it again, and then down at the place where the flame had scorched his glove. "No, by dammo!" he said. "Right, you. A dragon it is, I believe."

They both regarded it with some apprehension.

"Glad, I am, not to live in China," observed Bronwen.

Those who were privileged to see the creature during the next day or two supported almost to a man the theory that it was a dragon. This, they established by poking sticks through the wire-netting of the hutch that Hwyl had made for it until it obliged with a resentful huff of flame. Even Mr. Jones, the Chapel, did not doubt its authenticity, though on the propriety of its presence in his community he preferred to reserve judgment for the present.

After a short time, however, Bronwen Hughes put an end to the practice of poking it. For one thing, she felt responsible to Dai for its well-being, for another, it was beginning to develop an irritable disposition, and a liability to emit flame without cause; for yet another, and although Mr. Jones' decision on whether it could be considered as one of God's creatures or not was still pending, she felt that in the meantime it deserved equal rights with other dumb animals. So she put a card on the hutch saying: PLEASE NOT TO TEASE, and most of the time was there to see that it was heeded.

Almost all Llynllawn, and quite a few people from Llangolwg-coch, too, came to see it. Sometimes they would stand for an hour or more, hoping to see it huff. If it did, they went off satisfied that it was a dragon; but if it maintained a contented, non-fire-breathing mood, they went and told their friends that it was really no more than a little old lizard, though, big, mind you.

Idris Bowen was an exception to both categories. It was not until his third visit that he was privileged to see it snort, but even then he remained unconvinced.

"Unusual, it is, yes," he admitted. "But a dragon it is not. Look you at the dragon of Wales, or the dragon of St. George, now. To huff fire is something, I grant you, but wings, too, a dragon must be having, or a dragon he is not."

But that was the kind of cavilling that could be expected from Idris, and disregarded.

After ten days or so of crowded evenings, however, interest slackened. Once one had seen the dragon and exclaimed over the brilliance of its coloring, there was little to add, beyond being glad that it was in the Hughes' house rather than one's own, and wondering how big it would eventually grow.

For, really, it did not do much but sit and blink, and perhaps give a little huff of flame if you were lucky. So, presently, the Hughes' home became more their own again.

And, no longer pestered by visitors, the dragon showed an equable disposition. It never huffed at Bronwen, and seldom at Hwyl. Bronwen's first feeling of antagonism passed quickly, and she found herself growing attached to it. She fed it, and looked after it, and found that on a diet consisting chiefly of minced horseflesh and dog-biscuits it grew with astonishing speed. Most of the time, she let it run free in the room. To quiet the misgiving of callers she would explain:

"Friendly, he is, and pretty ways he has with him, if there is not teasing. Sorry for him, I am, too, for bad it is to be an only child, and an orphan worse still. And less than an orphan, he is, see. Nothing of his own sort he is knowing, not likely, either. So very lonely he is being, poor thing, I think."

But, inevitably, there came an evening when Hwyl, looking thoughtfully at the dragon, remarked:

"Outside you, soon. There is too big for the house you are getting, see."

Bronwen was surprised to find how unwilling she felt about that.

"Very good and quiet, he is,"

"But—" he went on, "but another thing, too, I am reading she said. "There is clever he is to tuck his tail away not to trip people, too. And clean with the house he is, also, and no trouble. Always out to the yard at proper times, Right as clock-work."

"Behaving well, he is, indeed,"

Hwyl agreed. "But growing so fast, now. More room he will be needing, see. A fine hutch for him in the yard, and with a run to it, I think."

The advisability of that was demonstrated a week later when Bronwen came down one morning to find the end of the wooden hutch charred away, the carpet and rug smouldering, and the dragon comfortably curled up in Hwyl's easy chair.

"Settled, it is, and lucky indeed not to burn in our bed. Out you," Hwyl told the dragon. "A fine thing to burn a man's house for him, and not grateful, either. For shame, I am telling you."

The insurance-man who came to inspect the damage thought similarly.

"Notified, you should have," he told Bronwen. "A fire-risk, he is, you see."

Bronwen protested that the policy made no mention of dragons.

"No, indeed," the man admitted, "but a normal hazard he is not, either. Inquire, I will, from Head Office how it is, see. But better to turn him out before more trouble, and thankful, too."

So, a couple of days later, the dragon was occupying a large hutch, constructed of asbestos sheets, in the yard. There was a wire-netted run in front of it, but most of the time Bronwen locked the gate, and left the backdoor of the house open so that he could come and go as he liked. In the morning he would trot in, and help Bronwen by huffing the kitchen fire into a blaze, but apart from that he had learnt not to huff in the house. The only times he was any bother to anyone were the occasions when he set his straw on fire in the night so that the neighbors got up to see if the house was burning, and were somewhat short about it the next day.

Hwyl kept a careful account of the cost of feeding him, and hoped that it was not running into more than Dai would be willing to pay. Otherwise, his only worries were his failure to find a cheap, non-inflammable bedding-stuff, and speculation on

how big the dragon was likely to grow before Dai should return to take him off his hands. Very likely all would have gone smoothly until that happened, but for the unpleasantness with Idris Bowen.

The trouble which blew up unexpectedly one evening was really of Idris' own finding. Hwyl had finished his meal, and was peacefully enjoying the last of the day beside his door, when Idris happened along, leading his whippet on a string.

"Oh, hullo you, Idris," Hwyl greeted him, amiably.

"Hullo you, Hwyl," said Idris. "And how is that phony dragon of yours, now then?"

"Phony, is it, you are saying?" repeated Hwyl, indignant-ly.

"Wings a dragon is wanting, to be a dragon," Idris insisted, firmly.

"Wings to hell, man! Come you and look at him now then, and please to tell me what he is if he is no dragon."

He waved Idris into the house, and led him through into the yard. The dragon, reclining in its wired run, opened an eye at them, and closed it again.

Idris had not seen it since it was lately out of the egg. Its growth impressed him.

"There is big he is now," he conceded. "Fine, the colors of

him, and fancy, too. But still no wings to him, so a dragon he is not."

"What, then, is it he is?" demanded Hwyl.

How Idris would have replied to this difficult question was never to be known, for at that moment the whippet jerked its string free from his fingers, and dashed, barking, at the wire-netting. The dragon was startled out of its snooze. It sat up suddenly, and snorted with surprise. There was a yelp from the whippet which bounded into the air, and then set off round and round the yard, howling. At last, Idris managed to corner it, and pick it up. All down the right side its hair had been scorched off, making it look very peculiar. Idris' eyebrows lowered.

"Trouble you want, is it? And trouble you will be having, by God!" he said.

He put the whippet down again, and began to take off his coat.

It was not clear whether he had addressed, and meant to fight, Hwyl or the dragon, but either intention was forestalled by Mrs. Hughes coming to investigate the yelping.

"Oh! Teasing the dragon is it!" she said. "There is shameful, indeed. A lamb the dragon is, as people know well. But not

to tease. It is wicked you are, Idris Bowen, and to fight does not make right, either. Go you from here, now then."

Idris began to protest, but Bronwen shook her head and set her mouth.

"Not listening to you, I am, see. A fine brave man, to tease a helpless dragon. Not for weeks now has the dragon huffed. So go you, and quick."

Idris glowered. He hesitated, and pulled on his jacket again. He collected his whippet, and held it in his arms. After a final disparaging glance at the dragon, he turned.

"Law I will have of you," he announced ominously, as he left.

Nothing more, however, was heard of legal action. It seemed as if Idris had either changed his mind or been advised against it, and that the whole thing would blow over. But three weeks later was the night of the Union Branch meeting.

It had been a dull meeting, devoted chiefly to passing a number of resolutions suggested to it by its headquarters, as a matter of course. Then, just at the end, when there did not seem to be any other business, Idris Bowen rose.

"Stay, you!" said the Chairman to those who were prepar-

ing to leave, and he invited Idris to speak.

Idris waited for persons who were half-in and half-out of their overcoats to subside, then:

"Comrades—" he began.

There was immediate uproar. Through the mingled approbation and cries of "Order" and "Withdraw" the Chairman smote energetically with his gavel until quiet was restored.

"Tendencious, that is," he reproved Idris. "Please to speak half-way, and in good order."

Idris began again:

"Fellow workers. Sorry indeed, I am, to have to tell you of a discovery I am making. A matter of disloyalty, I am telling you: grave disloyalty to good friends and com— and fellow workers, see." He paused, and went on:

"Now, every one of you is knowing of Hwyl Hughes' dragon, is it? Seen him for yourselves you have likely, too. Seen him myself, I have, and saying he was no dragon. But now then, I am telling you, wrong I was, wrong, indeed. A dragon he is, and not to doubt, though no wings.

"I am reading in the Encyclopedia in Merthyr Public Library about two kinds of dragons, see. Wings the European dragon has, indeed. But wings the Oriental dragon has not. So apologizing

now to Mr. Hughes, I am, and sorry."

A certain restiveness becoming apparent in the audience was quelled by a change in his tone.

"But—" he went on, "but another thing, too, I am reading there, and troubled inside myself with it, I am. I will tell you. Have you looked at the feet of this dragon, is it? Claws there is, yes, and nasty, too. But how many, I am asking you? And five, I am telling you. Five with each foot." He paused dramatically, and shook his head. "Bad, is that, bad, indeed. For, look you, Chinese a five-toed dragon is, yes—but five-toed is not a People's dragon; five-toed is an *Imperial* dragon, see. A symbol, it is, of the oppression of Chinese workers and peasants. And shocking to think that in our village we are keeping such an emblem. What is it that the free people of China will be saying of Llynllawn when they will hear of this, I am asking? What is it Mao Tse Tung, glorious leader of the heroic Chinese people in their magnificent fight for peace, will be thinking of South Wales and this imperialist dragon?" he was continuing, when differences of view in the audience submerged his voice.

Again the Chairman called the meeting to order. He offered

Hwyl the opportunity to reply, and after the situation had been briefly explained, the dragon was, on a show of hands, acquitted of political implication by all but Idris' doctrinaire faction, and the meeting broke up.

Hwyl told Bronwen about it when he got home.

"No surprise there," she said. "Jones the Post is telling me, telegraphing Idris has been."

"Telegraphing?" inquired Hwyl.

"Yes, indeed. Asking the *Daily Worker*, in London, how is the party-line on imperialist dragons, he was. But no answer yet, though."

A few mornings later the Hughes were awakened by a hammering on their door. Hwyl went to the window and found Idris below. He asked what the matter was.

"Come you down here, and I will show you," Idris told him.

After some argument, Hwyl descended. Idris led the way round to the back of his own house, and pointed.

"Look you there, now," he said.

The door of Idris' henhouse was hanging by one hinge. The remains of two chickens lay close by. A large quantity of feathers was blowing about the yard.

Hwyl looked at the henhouse more closely. Several deep-raked scores stood out white on the creosoted wood. In other places there were darker smears where the wood seemed to have been scorched. Silently Idris pointed to the ground. There were marks of sharp claws, but no imprint of a whole foot.

"There is bad. Foxes is it?" inquired Hwyl.

Idris choked slightly.

"Foxes, you are saying. Foxes, indeed! What will it be but your dragon? And the police to know it, too."

Hwyl shook his head.

"No," he said.

"Oh," said Idris. "A liar, I am, is it? I will have the guts from you, Hwyl Hughes, smoking hot, too, and glad to do it."

"You talk too easy, man," Hwyl told him. "Only how the dragon is still fast in his hutch, I am saying. Come you now, and see."

They went back to Hwyl's house. The dragon was in his hutch, sure enough, and the door of it was fastened with a peg. Furthermore, as Hwyl pointed out, even if he had left it during the night, he could not have reached Idris' yard without leaving scratches and traces on the way, and there were none to be found.

They finally parted in a state

of armistice. Idris was by no means convinced, but he was unable to get round the facts, and not at all impressed with Hwyl's suggestion that a practical joker could have produced the effect on the henhouse with a strong nail and a blowtorch.

Hwyl went upstairs again to finish dressing.

"There is funny it is, all the same," he observed to Bronwen. "Not seeing, that Idris was, but scorched the peg is, on the *outside* of the hutch. And how should that be, I wonder?"

"Huffed four times in the night the dragon has, five, perhaps," Bronwen said. "Growling, he is, too, and banging that old hutch about. Never have I heard him like that before."

"There is queer," Hwyl said, frowning. "But never out of his hutch, and that to swear to."

Two nights later Hwyl was awakened by Bronwen shaking his shoulder.

"Listen, now then," she told him.

There was an unmistakable growling going on at the back of the house, and the sound of several snorts.

"Huffing, he is, see," said Bronwen, unnecessarily.

There was a crash of something thrown with force, and the sound of a neighbor's voice cursing. Hwyl reluctantly decided

that he had better get up and investigate.

Everything in the yard looked as usual, except for the presence of a large tin can which was clearly the object thrown. There was, however, a strong smell of burning, and a thudding noise, recognizable as the sound of the dragon tramping round and round in his hutch to stamp out the bedding caught alight again. Hwyl went across, and opened the door. He raked out the smouldering straw, fetched some fresh, and threw it in.

"Quiet, you," he told the dragon. "More of this, and the hide I will have off you, slow and painful, too. Bed, now then, and sleep."

He went back to bed himself, but it seemed as if he had only just laid his head on the pillow when it was daylight, and there was Idris Bowen hammering on the front door again.

Idris was more than a little incoherent, but Hwyl gathered that something further had taken place at his house, so he slipped on jacket and trousers, and went down. Idris led the way down beside his own house, and threw open the yard door with the air of a conjuror. Hwyl stared for some moments without speaking.

In front of Idris' henhouse stood a kind of trap, roughly

netting. In it, surrounded by contrived of angle-iron and wire-chicken feathers, and glaring at them from eyes like live topazes, sat a creature, blood-red all over.

"Now, there is a dragon for you, indeed," Idris said. "Not to have colors like you see on a merry-go-round at a circus, either. A serious dragon, that one, and proper—wings, too, see?"

Hwyl went on looking at the dragon without a word. The wings were folded at present, and the cage did not give room to stretch them. The red, he saw now, was darker on the back, and brighter beneath, giving it the rather ominous effect of being lit from below by a blast-furnace. It certainly had a more practical aspect than his own dragon, and a fiercer look about it, altogether. He stepped forward to examine it more closely.

"Careful, man," Idris warned him, laying a hand on his arm.

The dragon curled back its lips, and snorted. Twin flames a yard long shot out of its nostrils. It was a far better huff than the other dragon had ever achieved. The air was filled with a strong smell of burnt feathers.

"A fine dragon, that is," Idris said again. "A real Welsh dragon for you. Angry he is, see, and no wonder. A shocking

thing for an imperialist dragon to be in his country. Come to throw him out, he has, and mincemeat he will be making of your namby-pamby, best-parlor dragon, too!"

"Better for him not to try," said Hwyl, stouter in word than heart.

"And another thing, too. Red this dragon is, and so a real people's dragon, see."

"Now then. Now then. Propaganda with dragons again, is it? Red the Welsh dragon has been two thousand years, and a fighter, too, I grant you. But a fighter for Wales, look; not just a loud-mouth talker of fighting for peace, see. If it is a good red Welsh dragon he is, then out of some kind of egg laid by your Uncle Joe, he is not; and thankful, too, I think," Hwyl told him. "And look you," he added as an afterthought, "this one it is who is stealing your chickens, not mine, at all."

"Oh, let him have the old chickens, and glad," Idris said. "Here he is come to chase a foreign imperialist dragon out of his rightful territory, and a proper thing it is, too. None of your D. P. dragons are we wanting round Llynllawn, or South Wales, either."

"Get you to hell, man," Hwyl told him. "Sweet dispositioned my dragon is, no bother to any-

one, and no robber of henhouses, either. If there is trouble at all, the law I will be having of you and your dragon for disturbing of the peace, see. So I am telling you. And goodbye, now."

He exchanged another glance with the angry-looking, topaz eyes of the red dragon, and then stalked away, back to his own house.

That evening, just as Hwyl was sitting down to his meal, there was a knock at the front door. Bronwen went to answer it, and came back.

"Ivor Thomas and Dafydd Ellis wanting you. Something about the Union," she told him.

He went to see them. They had a long and involved story about dues that seemed not to have been fully paid. Hwyl was certain that he was paid-up to date, but they remained unconvinced. The argument went on for some time before, with head-shaking and reluctance, they consented to leave. Hwyl returned to the kitchen. Bronwen was waiting, standing by the table.

"Taken the dragon off, they have," she said, flatly.

Hwyl stared at her. The reason why he had been kept at the front-door in pointless argument suddenly came to him. He crossed to the window, and

looked out. The back fence had been pushed flat, and a crowd of men carrying the dragon's hutch on their shoulders was already a hundred yards beyond it. Turning round, he saw Bronwen standing resolutely against the backdoor.

"Stealing, it is, and you not calling," he said; accusingly.

"Knocked you down, they would, and got the dragon just the same," she said. "Idris Bowen and his lot, it is."

Hwyl looked out of the window again.

"What to do with him, now then?" he asked.

"Dragon fight, it is," she told him. "Betting, they were. Five to one on the Welsh dragon, and sounding very sure, too."

Hwyl shook his head.

"Not to wonder, either. There is not fair, at all. Wings, that Welsh dragon has, so air attacks he can make. Unsporting, there is, and shameful indeed."

He looked out of the window again. More men were joining the party as it marched its burden across the wasteground, towards the slag-heap. He sighed.

"There is sorry I am for our dragon. Murder it will be, I think. But go and see it, I will. So no tricks from that Idris to make a dirty fight dirtier."

Bronwen hesitated.

"No fighting for you? You promise me?" she said.

"Is it a fool I am, girl, to be fighting fifty men, and more. Please to grant me some brains, now."

She moved doubtfully out of his way, and let him open the door. Then she snatched up a scarf, and ran after him, tying it over her head as she went.

The crowd that was gathering on a piece of flat ground near the foot of the slag-heap already consisted of something more like a hundred men than fifty, and there were more hurrying to join it. Several self-constituted stewards were herding people back to clear an oval space. At one end of it was the cage in which the red dragon crouched huddled, with a bad-tempered look. At the other, the asbestos hutch was set down, and its bearers withdrew. Idris noticed Hwyl and Bronwen as they came up.

"And how much is it you are putting on your dragon?" he inquired, with a grin.

Bronwen said, before Hwyl could reply:

"Wicked, it is, and ashamed you should be, Idris Bowen. Clip you your dragon's wings to fight fair, and we will see. But betting against a horseshoe in the glove, we are not." And she dragged Hwyl away.

All about the oval the laying of bets went on, with the Welsh dragon gaining favor all the time. Presently, Idris stepped out into the open, and held up his hands for quiet.

"Sport it is for you tonight. Super colossal attraction, as they are saying on the movies, and never again, likely. So put you your money, now. When the English law is hearing of this, no more dragon-fighting, it will be—like no more to cockfight." A boo went up, mingled with the laughter of those who knew a thing or two about cock-fighting that the English law did not. Idris went on: "So now the dragon championship, I am giving you. On my right, the Red Dragon of Wales, on his home ground. A people's dragon, see. For more than a coincidence, it is, that the color of the Welsh dragon—" His voice was lost for some moments in controversial shouts. It re-emerged, saying: "—left, the decadent dragon of the imperialist exploiters of the suffering Chinese people who, in their glorious fight for peace under the heroic leadership—" But the rest of his introduction was also lost among the catcalls and cheers that were still continuing when he beckoned forward attendants from the ends of the oval, and withdrew.

At one end, two men reached

up with a hooked pole, pulled over the contraption that enclosed the red dragon, and ran back hurriedly. At the far end, a man knocked the peg from the asbestos door, pulled it open, scuttled round behind the hutch, and no less speedily out of harm's way.

The red dragon looked round, uncertainly. It tentatively tried unfurling its wings. Finding that possible, it reared up on its hind legs, supporting itself on its tail, and flapped them energetically, as though to dispel the creases.

The other dragon ambled out of its hutch, advanced a few feet, and stood blinking. Against the background of the waste ground and slag-heap it looked more than usually exotic. It yawned largely, with a fine display of fangs, rolled its eyes hither and thither, and then caught sight of the red dragon.

Simultaneously, the red dragon noticed the other. It stopped flapping, and dropped to all four feet. The two regarded one another. A hush came over the crowd. Both dragons remained motionless, except for a slight waving of the last foot or so of their tails.

The oriental dragon turned its head a little on one side. It snorted slightly, and shrivelled up a patch of weeds.

The red dragon stiffened. It suddenly adopted a pose gardant, one forefoot uplifted with claws extended, wings raised. It huffed with vigor, vaporized a puddle, and disappeared momentarily in a cloud of steam. There was an anticipatory murmur from the crowd.

The red dragon began to pace round, circling the other, giving a slight flap of its wings now and then.

The crowd watched it intently. So did the other dragon. It did not move from its position, but turned as the red dragon circled, keeping its head and gaze steadily towards it.

With the circle almost completed, the red dragon halted. It extended its wings widely, and gave a full-throated roar. Simultaneously, it gushed two streams of fire, and belched a small cloud of black smoke. The part of the crowd nearest to it moved back, apprehensively.

At this tense moment Bronwen Hughes began suddenly to laugh. Hwyl shook her by the arm.

"Hush, you! There is not funny, at all," he said, but she did not stop at once.

The oriental dragon did nothing for a moment. It appeared to be thinking the matter over. Then it turned swiftly round, and began to run. The

crowd behind it raised a jeer, those in front waved their arms to shoo it back. But the dragon was unimpressed by arm-waving. It came on, with now and then a short spurt of flame from its nostrils. The people wavered, and then scattered out of its way. Half-a-dozen men started to chase after it with sticks, but soon gave up. It was travelling at twice the pace they could run.

With a roar, the red dragon leapt into the air, and came across the field, spitting flames like a strafing aircraft. The crowd scattered still more swiftly, tumbling over itself as it cleared a way.

The running dragon disappeared round the foot of the slag-heap, with the other hovering above it. Shouts of disappointment rose from the crowd, and a good part of it started to follow, to be in at the death.

But in a minute or two the running dragon came into view again. It was making a fine pace up the mountainside, with the red dragon still flying a little behind it. Everybody stood watching it wind its way up and up until, finally, it disappeared over the shoulder. For a moment the flying dragon still showed as a black silhouette above the skyline, then, with a final whiff of flame, it, too, disappeared—and

the arguments about paying up began.

Idris left the wrangling to come across to the Hughes.

"So there is a coward your imperialist dragon is, then. And not one good huff, or a bite to him, either," he said.

Bronwen looked at him, and smiled.

"So foolish, you are, Idris Bowen, with your head full of propaganda and fighting. Other things than to fight, there is, even for dragons. Such a brave show your red dragon was making, such a fine show, oh, yes—and very like a peacock, I am thinking. Very like the boys in their Sunday suits in Llangolwg-coch High Street, too—all dressed up to kill, but not to fight."

Idris stared at her.

"And our dragon," she went on. "Well, there is not a very new trick, either. Done a bit of it before now, I have, myself." Shé cast a sidelong glance at Hwyl.

Light began to dawn on Idris.

"But—but it is *he* you were always calling your dragon," he protested.

Bronwen shrugged.

"Oh, yes, indeed. But how to tell with dragons?" she asked.

She turned to look up the mountain.

"There is lonely, lonely the red dragon must have been these two thousand years—so not much bothering with your politics, he is, just now. More single with his mind, see. And interesting it will be, indeed, to be having a lot of baby dragons in Wales before long, I am thinking."

Our companion magazine, SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES, is out with an issue which we feel should be of as much interest to readers of fantasy as the hard-and-fast s-f fans. The lead story is by Raymond Z. Gallun. His last story in that magazine won so much acclaim from readers that we were hesitant about another, for fear it couldn't live up to the first. But we didn't have to worry. LEGACY FROM MARS deals with a pair of crazily charming goldfish from the red planet with a delicacy of feeling and logic that makes it a natural.

Erik van Lhn's story in the same issue is developing into one of the most realistic novels we've seen. It doesn't deal with a host of gadgets, but it does have a solid background on a new planet, and a cast of characters that deserve consideration as straight literature, as well as science fiction.

KOENIGSHAUFEN'S C U R V E

B Y H. B. F Y F E

ILLUSTRATED BY SMITH

The whole geometry of random curves lay in the instrument which Eric put together on his drafting table—and something of the geometry of alien beauty through a window into...nowhere.

A rumor had once circulated among the other draftsmen at the lab to the effect that Eric Koenigshaufen had bought an extra razor and tried to save time by shaving with both hands simultaneously.

What he did with the ten or twenty seconds net gain—left by the time the flow of blood had been stanch—became the subject of wildly burlesque speculation, but every newcomer to the department was assured of the truth of the original incident. The meekest expression of doubt was quashed by pointing to Eric's drafting table, in the left rear corner of the office.

"Nearest one to the door," Henry Russell, the chief draftsman, liked to emphasize. "Saves him time at five o'clock!"

"But you gotta admit he's

efficient," said Len Andrews. "Look at the wall behind his chair! Everything he needs is hanging there within easy reach—curves, triangles, masking tape, even a spline and lead pigs!"

"Of course he has everything he needs!" retorted redheaded Charlie Cuff, turning around from the next table forward. "Half of it's ours, that's why!"

The three looked up as roly-poly Pete Hatcher sidled through the door.

"Here comes Eric," he announced.

"Naturally," commented Russell. "It's twelve fifty-nine and a half. He's just due back from lunch."

"It's not just that," smirked Pete. "It's what he spent his lunch hour making in the shop.



Remember Bill Norman saying he was sending some curves over after lunch to be inked?"

Russell groaned and covered his eyes with a limp hand.

"That knothead again!" he complained. "Why can't he do his own guessing? We can't draw a fair curve to his data any more than he can, but we somehow wind up trying over and over again."

"You should talk!" grunted Charlie Cuff. "It's always my turn to do the lettering on his charts, seems like. And you know the titles he asks for!"

"Uh-huh," Andrews sympathized. "He figures if he puts a paragraph where a word would do, it shows he did some thinking. Too bad he can't spell."

Clumping footsteps echoed in the hall. A moment later, a tall, lean young man flashed through the doorway. One long-legged stride took him to the high chair at the rear drafting table. He was seated there, pushing aside a T-square, almost before the sound of his approach died away. His face was long, even a little horsey, and tanned darker than the shock of ash-blond hair that hung over his forehead.

"Behold!" he announced in a rich, easy bass. "The Little Giant Home Model Miracle Anti-Knothead Curve!"

His blue eyes gleaming, he

held up a mess of plastic. The others gaped.

"What've you got there?" demanded Len Andrews, squinting at the device. "That's the three-sixty degree protractor in the middle, isn't it? An' a big forty-five triangle . . . a French curve . . . an' what else?"

"That's my little spiral!" wailed Charlie Cuff. "You . . . you have them bolted together."

"Also one of those long, sweeping curves," said Koenigs-haufen, "and that powerful two-inch one I use to fake the stuff a certain engineer sends in here. Now, look—here's how it'll work!"

He swept aside half a dozen sheets of graph paper and plopped the contraption onto his table.

"Naturally," he conceded, "I use this only when the plotted curve is obviously a danged lie."

Russell tried without much success to look disapproving. The other draftsmen drifted over from their own boards wearing grins of anticipation.

"Faced with the impossible, however," Eric orated, "I simply place this super-curve atop the alleged data, rotate the pointer of the protractor until it points to the appropriate sign of the zodiac—"

"Taurus?" suggested Russell.

"Precisely! I then proceed to

swivel the other curves about the single pivot screw until each and every plotted point is hidden beneath the plastic surface. This indicates that I am fairing a perfect average curve between the points—right?"

"Ah . . . you might look at it that way," admitted Pete, his round belly quivering.

"Then," continued Koenigshaufen, "I seize a number 4-H drawing pencil between the fingers of the right hand, stand well away from the board—note the position of the feet!—and with closed eyes draw the curve in and out, up and down, bumpity-bump, from one little section to the next. What do I get?"

"Fired, if you ever try it," said Russell.

"About as good a chart as Knothead gets any other way," said Cuff. "You forgot to put in a Leroy lettering pen to label the curve as you go."

"Patent it, boy!" advised Pete.

"What is it?" inquired a feminine voice.

The men glanced hastily toward the door through which the girl had come unnoticed. For an instant, their expressions showed each to be taking a rapid check of the language used during the past minute, then they smiled a welcome.

The girl drifted gracefully

forward, removing several eleven-by-seventeen sheets of green graph paper from the stack of folders and memo pages she carried.

"Mr. Norman said to give these to Eric," she said. "He wants to know if you can have them done by tomorrow."

"Oh . . . sure . . . I guess so," said Koenigshaufen.

He accepted the plots without seeing them because he was busy admiring her auburn hair and wishing she wore it longer. It was the only fault he could find. It seemed to him a pity that a girl who filled out her clothes so trimly should sacrifice such beautiful hair to a passing fashion.

"He'll try, he means, Marie," Russell told her.

"Mr. Norman must depend on this department a lot," Marie told him. "I heard him telling the other engineers how he never makes up his mind about his experiments until the boys here go over his data so he can see what he has."

"We'd hardly know what to do without him either!" the chief draftsman assured her.

He waited until she had clicked down the hall, then turned to Koenigshaufen, at whom the others were grinning knowingly.

"All right, Eric, she's pretty

and her sweater is a nice shade of blue. Now, pull your eyeballs back inside the office and see what you can do with that job!"

Koenigshaufen looked at the plots and groaned. They were dotted with little circles, triangles, and x 's in various colors and with several styles of curlicues and tails to distinguish the separate species. Someone, with a very soft pencil, had worried a smudgy series of curves which undulated from the upper left corner of the sheet to the lower right, crossed in the middle by a comparatively horizontal group of lines.

"Shut your eyes an' toss a coin, Eric," Len Andrews advised.

Shaking their heads, the others drifted away, leaving Koenigshaufen to pore over the graphs in search of a point to attack them. Russell retired to his extra-long table at the front of the room, and talk died away as the afternoon's work was begun. Except for desultory repartee between Len and Pete, there remained only the hum of distant traffic borne through the windows on the warm air.

Koenigshaufen reached absently into his top drawer for an eraser and gently cleared away some of the smudges.

With a triangle, he attempted to get an idea of the slopes, then picked up a French curve and began to fair a line through Norman's data.

Eventually, he constructed something that vaguely resembled the original smudgy indications but which showed the touch of the practiced hand in its cleaner, smoother lines. He decided to attempt the next sheet. Laying his T-square across the top edge to hold down the curled corners, he stared in disgust at the engineer's fuzzy sketches.

Not one of them fits his data points! he thought. *Why doesn't he use a paint brush and be done with it? Why don't I get more of Mike Fisher's work, or MacDonald's? They at least know what they're doing.*

Leaning back to stretch the stiffness out of his shoulders, he realized that he had been bent over the first chart for nearly an hour. The others were quiet, intent upon their own work. Charlie Cuff hissed softly between his teeth as his lettering pen slipped. He laid aside the Leroy stencil and reached for the electric erasing machine.

I bet that if Norman knew what he was doing, Koenigshaufen reflected while the eraser whined, he wouldn't get such scattered measurements.

This chart is just a whopping lie! I built that composite curve for a gag, but you'd really need something like it to—

Without especially considering it, he reached out a long arm and took up the contraption from the corner of his table. He placed it curiously over the green grid of the chart, and twiddled the component curves this way and that.

Hey! It almost indicated a line that time! he thought in surprise.

Leaning forward, he tried to recapture the position. Perhaps he decided, if he rotated the pointer of the protractor a few degrees . . . and edged the spiral curve over a trifle . . . it might have a look about it of fitting the plotted curve. He could call the fellows over for a laugh.

The green lines, ten to the half inch with every fifth one accented, shimmered slightly under the several thicknesses of clear plastic. With the shadowed edges of the latter and the criss-cross of penciled curves, they formed a peculiarly distorted pattern.

Koenigshaufen blinked and thrust his nose closer to the paper. As he rotated the plastic guides about the pivot, the colored data points seemed now and then to fall into line, even

if nowhere near the arrangement sketched by Norman.

He lost the setting again, by moving the French curve a shade too far, and was annoyed. He was rapidly forgetting the joke in his curiosity to find out whether the gadget actually could detect some kind of pattern.

"Whether Bill Norman recognizes it or not," he breathed.

The complicated interweaving of lines and colors writhed before his eyes and he blinked again to clear his vision.

Something in the mess seemed to *move*. He peered yet closer.

Immediately, the interlocking lines and curves took on a depth, a perspective that was odd but absorbing. Koenigshaufen could almost imagine himself moving *into* the pattern . . . becoming part of it . . . or at least seeing into its depths as into a dim clearing between the branches of a forest.

Something moved definitely in the "clearing," a vague shadow that drew his attention still further into the pattern. Koenigshaufen lost track of the muted sounds of the drafting room. The whine of the electric eraser, the buzz of low conversation, distant traffic noises—all faded before his concentrated

determination to see what made the shadows in front of him shift and coalesce in such weird fashion.

His slight motion—by now, his nose nearly touched the gadget—brought the scene into better focus. He encountered a cool sensation of being underwater. Everything before his eyes was a luminous sea-green, and the next large shadow that undulated across his field of vision like some mysterious monster of the deeps.

With the passing of the huge shadow, the emerald hue shimmered and melted into a limpid azure. Smaller shapes darted blurrily this way and that. Eric flinched as one flashed straight at him.

The slight movement induced a further metamorphosis in the view. The brilliant blue became shot through with gently swirling currents of topaz and sepia. Scintillating sparks of other tints showered here and there. Koenigshaufen gaped, breathless, at the swelling symphony of color. Faintly to his ears floated vague sighs, as of breezes twirling the leaves of swaying trees.

The blues and greens, streaks of ivory or soft gray, flecks of scarlet flame deepening into russet and mauve washed about him, more pure, more vivid

more variegated than he had ever experienced. Some sleepy part of his mind tried to suggest that he dreamt; but he thrust the idea down, entranced by the sheer pleasure of the visual adventure.

Then the first silvery music coalesced out of the background. Koenigshaufen realized in a moment that it was not music as he had understood the word, but random notes of a delicate sweetness. Unless it was exquisitely subtle, no definite rhythm existed. He tried tapping one out with his forefinger on the pointer of the protractor.

Koenigshaufen gasped as his vision clicked into sharp focus. His finger froze in position.

It's like a peephole into another world! he thought.

The shimmer of green and blue withdrew to the distance, resolving itself into tumbling waves of a misty sea. On the shore rose a city of white and pearly gray towers, shadowed with lilac blotches. Koenigshaufen seemed to see it across miles of open parkland unmarred by roads or buildings.

As he stared, drinking in the delicate, fairy-like air of the distant metropolis, something nearer to him moved. He looked upward.

An iridescent bubble skim-

med through the air, as if it had just passed over Koenigshaufen's head, and dwindled toward the city. It took him some moments to realize that he had seen two people inside, looking as much at their ease as if they sat on solid ground.

He still had not completely accepted this sight when another bubble grew swiftly out of the distance.

I'm getting a good look at this one! he promised himself.

So intent was he that the determination itself, or some tiny muscular contraction that accompanied it, affected his view. As the bubble passed to his right, he seemed suddenly swept up and drawn along in its wake. Eric realized vaguely that his body experienced none of the thrill of such birdlike flight; yet his other self swooped along in pursuit of the crystalline sphere. He saw that it flew toward a range of shadowed hills.

At closer range, the being inside the bubble looked more human than Koenigshaufen had expected. He was slim, but broad of shoulder, and wore his coal-black hair so long that it curled to the wide collar of his feathered cloak. The lambent reflections of the plumes shifted from an indigo sheen to bottle green and back whenever the cloak moved. Occasional glints of

opalescent light streaming behind the conveyance made the image waver before Eric's eyes.

The bubble slanted downward toward the foothills. Into Koenigshaufen's sight crept a trim village of round-roofed huts surrounded by level grain fields. As they descended, the twilight became more apparent, dulling the gold of the fields and the expanses of green about the huts.

Just before the bubble dipped lightly to the ground, his attention was captured by the structure that rose beyond the village. Eric caught one glimpse of dark, squat figures scuttling from the huts to meet the bubble, but his instinctive craning spoiled the focus again.

The scene gradually drifted back to him, though from a different angle.

Above his head reared the walls of what could only be a castle, although it looked entirely too insubstantial to be any kind of a fortress. Koenigshaufen gazed up at the soaring spires that could not possibly, in their delicate grace, be strong enough to reach such proud heights. The shadows here were already deeper, lending the walls the appearance of veiled mother-of-pearl.

Something else had changed, he discovered, with the shift.

No sounds came now to his ears. He missed the undercurrent of musical notes and the rushing of air. Thus, he had no warning when the dim figures marched up from his left.

In the lead strode the feather-cloaked man from the flying bubble. Several squat beings followed him, but Eric could not make them out in the dimness. They moved with such a slinking gait that he suspected he might not have heard them even if really standing beside them.

The leader led them up to the wall and gestured. One of his followers stepped apart and hurled something upward. It must have been a noose or grapple, for the slim man a moment later slipped off his cloak and began to climb the rope that Koenigshaufen sensed more than saw. As his followers gathered to watch, Eric caught the gleaming outlines of fantastically curved axes. From the climber's belt dangled a strangely tapered tube about two feet long.

Something nasty is going on here! Koenigshaufen thought. *These birds are up to no good, or they'd call at the front door.*

He tried to look up to determine the goal of the climbing man. Something twisted out of phase, and he was swept back amid a swirling kaleidoscope of flashing colors.

Koenigshaufen cursed under his breath.

Steady! he exhorted himself. *Keep your mind concentrated on staying around! Don't lose it!*

With tantalizing slowness, he passed again through a phase of disorganized but mellifluous musical notes. Gradually, images began to take shape before his eyes. A pang of disappointment shot through him as he realized he had lost the scene after all.

He seemed to be staring straight at as weird a being as he had ever imagined. It was grotesquely broad of shoulder, and purple as a plum where its skin was not hidden by a copper colored tunic. With seven-fingered hands, it plucked at the strings of a complicated instrument hung with tinkling bits of bright metal.

Koenigshaufen noticed that he could hear again. The music was difficult to follow but beautiful as the rippling of a purling brook—and then it dawned upon him that he actually heard the splashing of water.

He decided that it must come from somewhere else in the chamber, and hoped he had succeeded in shifting his view to the inside of the castle.

His attention was lured back to the minstrel as the latter opened huge amber eyes at the end of a jingling melody. He—

Koenigshaufen decided he might as well think of it as a man—immediately swung into another, more dulcet, tune. Eric took a better look at him.

He thought the player's skull seemed round; but its true shape was concealed by a variety of turban wound of satiny vermilion material and decorated at one side by a clump of snowy plumes. The being's nose, beneath the lambent yellow eyes, was narrow and hooked like a hawk's beak, but his general expression was somehow kindly.

The wide instrument, closer to being a many-stringed lyre than anything Koenigshaufen could think of, was tilted back against an enormous chest so that both queer hands were free to ripple over the strings. The minstrel smiled dreamily as someone began to sing.

Koenigshaufen listened, enchanted. The voice started as a warm contralto but soared upward with the music to impossible heights while remaining clear and true as a bell. Then it slid down the scales again into a crooning love song.

Koenigshaufen tensed against moving a muscle. He hardly dared to breathe, lest he miss a single golden note.

What can she be like? he wondered. *Shall I wait to see if she*

comes this way, or shall I try to shift?

He feared that if he attempted to change his apparent point of view, he might go too far and lose the scene completely, as had happened before. Yet, he reminded himself, that sneaking climber must be well up the wall by now. If only he could give some warning!

The singing paused for a new series of echoing splashes. After a moment, the sweet voice resumed. The minstrel within Koenigshaufen's fascinated gaze continued to strum his tinkling melodies. In the soft light, his instrument glittered almost hypnotically.

Those squares of metal! Koenigshaufen thought. *Maybe I could see the rest of the place by using one as a mirror.*

The silvery ornaments swirled in constant motion, but he spotted one which rotated quite slowly.

That one, he told himself. *It's swinging around . . . another few minutes . . .*

He felt the view lurch away from him. It was almost like the first split-second following a slip on winter ice, and Eric reacted with the same prickling thrill of fright.

He gripped frantically with both hands at some unseen support which alone saved him from

plunging into a dark, terrifying emptiness. Then, as he adjusted to the shift of view brought on by his straining forward, he saw that the darkness was not empty. A blurred object approached slowly, swaying rhythmically.

Eric found himself staring down at the strained face of the climber he had earlier watched start up the wall. The man hauled at the rope hand over hand, "walking" his way up the stone surface with seeming ease, as if he weighed less than he should have in Koenigshaufen's real world.

I don't like the look on his face, thought the watcher. *This is no joke he's up to! Don't they have any guards here?*

He himself seemed to hang precariously on the edge of a parapet. He could not see the grapping iron supporting the rope, but a section of stone tower was dimly visible to his right. As he looked, he discovered that the gentle glow illuminating the face of the tower came from a curved lamp of orange glass. Hanging by a thin chain from a projecting metal rod, this lamp swung restlessly in the wind.

How much closer before it smashes? Koenigshaufen wondered.

He stared narrowly at the

bulging middle of the lamp as it tossed almost against the rough stone before dropping away. On the next swing, he could nearly convince himself it came closer.

A glance downward revealed the climber progressing steadily higher. He would reach the parapet in a matter of seconds if not prevented.

Frozen in position, Koenigshaufen rolled his eyes desperately to his right and sought to will the lamp closer to the wall on its next swing . . . and the next . . . and the next—

It splintered suddenly against the stone.

The scene was abruptly dimmed.

I did it! I did it! Koenigshaufen exulted, refusing to share the credit for such a prodigious act of concentration with a mere breeze.

A bobbing light splashed rudely along the face of the tower. An instant later, a torch was held over the parapet by a dark, turbaned being akin to the minstrel inside.

This one turned away from Eric and beckoned urgently. He was joined immediately by another guard. The second bore a tube like the one Eric had seen at the belt of the climbing man, but the backs of the two new-

comers hid its operation as they bent to look down.

The effect, however, was spectacular enough. A flickering stream of blue sparks showered downward, fading as they reached the man on the rope. The latter slipped several feet, and Koenigshaufen saw one of his arms dangle loosely as if paralyzed. With the other, he hugged the rope to him while he twined his legs about it so as to slide safely down.

The first guard thrust the torch into his companion's broad hands—Eric gathered that the range of the weapon must be short—and began to saw at the rope with a long, wickedly curved knife.

That did it! Koenigshaufen congratulated himself.

He watched the man on the rope sliding rapidly downward, his features a mask of fury and frustration, and decided the fellow might possibly reach the distant ground before the rope parted. Koenigshaufen cared little one way or the other. He longed to be back inside the castle.

In his excitement, he forgot to notice how he managed it. Abruptly, he discovered he had regained nearly the same position he had lost a few minutes before.

Careful! he warned himself.

His view seemed steady, however. Nothing had changed except that he was even closer to the swirling silver ornaments. He had for some reason not yet recovered clear hearing, though conscious of distant, indistinct sounds; and so it was in near-silence that he concentrated upon one gently twisting little mirror. He had a queer feeling that if he once saw the singer, he would again hear that glorious voice.

Koenigshaufen's heart leaped and began to pound. Her reflection drifted into range on the square of silver.

She was no gnome or monster like the musician. Her skin gleamed pink and white against the ultramarine sheen of the bathing pool. Eric saw that her long-limbed grace concealed a supple strength. From her rounded breasts, his gaze moved to the mass of glossy, dark red hair that rippled to her waist. He had never seen a girl so lovely.

She was in the act of shaking out a wispy garment of some material that shimmered exotically like woven gold—when the metal square completed its turn.

Koenigshaufen felt as if suddenly cut off from the sun. Choking down his impatience, he waited for the ornament to complete another leisurely rotation.

Just one more second! he thought.

He felt that he might, with a determined effort, pass physically through to this vivid other world. He wondered if a sudden, concentrated act of will-power could accomplish the passage.

It's worth trying, he decided hopefully.

He focused all his attention upon the tantalizing glitter of the metal ornament. For a few breaths, nothing happened.

Then he sensed a vague drifting. He was moving nearer . . . nearer . . . nearer. He was on the point of slipping through—

Some inconceivable force seized him rudely and flung him back and up, away from the strings of the queer instrument and the fourteen fingers plucking nimbly at them.

"Hold on to him!" exclaimed a voice.

"Jeez, he don't look so good," said another, and Koenigshaufen recognized it as that of Len Andrews.

It seemed to him that he stared at the face before him for a long time until his dazed mind accepted it as belonging to Henry Russell. Eric looked hazily about. The other draftsmen were watching him with worried expressions.

"Gosh, Eric! You gave us a

scare!" sighed Russell. "We were just getting up to go home when Charlie saw you lying across your table. What's the matter?"

A sudden fear brought Koenigshaufen up straight.

"The curve!" he said thickly, trying to reach out for it.

Someone, disastrously, had shoved it aside, and the hands on his shoulders held him back from the board.

"Hang on! There he goes again!" snapped Russell.

"No," mumbled Koenigshaufen. "No . . . I . . . I'm all right. Just a little dizzy spell. I . . . I'll just sit here awhile. You fellows go on, if it's five o'clock."

"Chee-rist!" said Andrews. "Many's the time I said those curves of Norman's would sprain some draftsman's eye—but I never thought I'd actually see it happen!"

"Sure you don't want someone to stay with you a few minutes, Eric?" asked Russell, eyeing him intently.

"No, I'm all right, I tell you!"

"Here comes Mike, the watchman," suggested Pete Hatcher. "We could tell him to look in when he finishes his round."

"Sure, sure!" agreed Koenigshaufen. "That's good enough. You guys get on your way, now! I'd come with you, but I just want to catch my breath."

He waved them out. With a final anxious look, Russell allowed himself to be persuaded. Koenigshaufen was left alone with old Mike and his flashlight in the doorway.

"It's all right, Mike." He managed a grin. "Go ahead and finish your round. I'll be gone by the time you get back."

He listened to the receding footsteps as he held his composite curve up before his eyes. His hand trembled.

"It's got to work again!" he whispered fiercely. "I've got to get back to *her*!"

He reached out and with both hands set the curve gently down on top of the green graph paper. He started to lean forward.

He caught himself stiffly.

"What the hell, Eric!" he said

aloud. "You were just dreaming, and you know it. You sort of hypnotized yourself."

Still, it was hard to forget that strange feeling of being drawn *through* to the other world of color and beauty. He glanced at the curve again. He lifted a hand toward it, then hesitated.

"I can't risk it!" he groaned. "Maybe tomorrow . . . I'll think it over."

He stood up, swept the charts into a drawer, and began to cover his table. He was glad no one remained to see his face, for he knew he would not think about it again tomorrow.

"It would never work again," he whispered, "but that's something I'd rather not find out for sure!"

Many readers of fantasy feel that science fiction would be wonderful if it weren't for all the gadgets and the heavy science found in most of the magazines. They should be happy to know that **ROCKET STORIES** is edited for men who feel the same way. It's a magazine devoted to the romance and adventure of the future, and not to making junior Einsteins out of every reader.

The current issue features a hard-hitting story by Algis Budrys entitled **BLOOD ON MY JETS**. With it are top adventure yarns by such writers as Poul Anderson, Irving Cox, George O. Smith, and Milton Lesser.

We particularly enjoyed the non-technical article by Wade Kaempfert which proves that the only way to go forward in space is to turn around and head backwards!

FOXY'S HOLLOW

BY LEAH BODINE DRAKE

ILLUSTRATED BY SMITH

Bennett wasn't the best fox-hunter in that section; but it turned out that he was good at finding other things—shelter, a charming companion, an amusing tale—and a few facts that he wasn't looking for.

Burke Bennett was out with the Peddingham one wet day in autumn when his mare took a fence in the worst possible manner and threw her rider seven feet away.

When Burke tried to rise he found he had a sprained ankle and that the mare was nowhere to be seen.

Now isn't this dandy? thought Burke. Isn't this just dandy?

He didn't know where he was or how to get to Bewley Hall where he was staying, from here or how he'd walk there if he knew. Why couldn't he have stayed with the field instead of streaking off by himself in strange country?

Burke Bennett was a large young American with a red face and bad manners who wrote fiction of a sort about tanned young men who met beautiful

young women on beaches. He was much beloved by bookies and loan-sharks and was a great hand with the girls, none of whom he intended to marry. Lord Bewley, who collected Americans, Irishmen and Toby jugs, had asked him down for the hunting in a part of England that Burke didn't know very well, and here he was in the middle of Hawkhshire with a sprained ankle. He was sitting in the mud, cursing splendidly, when he saw a little wooded hollow nearby from which smoke was curling lazily. Now to Burke, who was no Boy Scout, smoke in the woods meant just one thing—a house. He hoisted himself painfully to his feet and limped off towards the trees.

When he got closer he saw he'd guessed right. There *was* a house there—big, half-timbered job, all sloping eaves, dormer



windows and little leaded panes. It was set in a formal garden of rose arbors, dark yews, and privet trimmed in the shapes of ships and peacocks. For a minute Burke had the idea that there was something odd about it. Then he realized what it was: the day had been misty, but now the sun was shining brightly on the golden beeches and glossy holly-trees. Must have cleared up in a hurry, he thought briefly. The house had a great many little twisty chimneys, two of which stood up on each side of the main building like the ears of some animal. Quaint as hell.

Thud! Thud! . . . Burke at the door-knocker, which was a fox's head in brass, and grinning. Nobody answered. Burke hadn't known he could swear so colorfully. He gave the door a kick and it swung open, so he walked in. There was a low-ceilinged hall with the usual things found in English country houses—good, heavy, old-fashioned furniture, crossed hunting-crops on the walls under foxes' masks, a stuffed otter (very dusty) on a side-board, and a fire blazing away on the hearth. Burke yelled, "Hey! Anybody home?" . . . Nobody. So he made himself cozy before the fire, pulled off his boot and decided to wait it out. Someone was bound to show up sometime.

The day waned. Dusk fell. Burke was nearly asleep when there was a noise at the front door, it was flung open and slammed shut, and a loud feminine voice said, "Beat 'em again, by gad!"

Burke took one look at the owner of the voice and forgot about his ankle. She was a slim, red-headed girl as beautiful as any of his own heroines. Instead of a bathing-suit, she wore russet tweeds, and she was breathing hard, which did interesting things to her chest. She didn't seem surprised to see Burke, and as she came over to the fire observed pleasantly, "What a run! Jolly good, though that last bullfinch is all that saved me! Please don't get up—I know you've hurt your foot." She added, "I'm Clarinda Foxer."

Burke, wondering how she knew about his ankle, explained who he was, and so on, and so forth, and said, "I'll have to ask your hospitality, Miss Foxer, until word can be gotten to Bewley Hall for somebody to drive over here and pick me up."

He really had no intention of leaving yet, and he turned on the charm that had devastated blonde Hungarian countesses. He was pleased to see that it worked here, as the young woman said, "Oh, not so fast! I haven't enjoyed a good-looking man's com-

pany for ages and I'm not giving you up so soon! Old Bewley can wait a bit. I like you—even if you *were* out with the Peddingham, blast 'em."

"Oh, you've been watching the hunt?" asked Burke.

The girl gave a sharp laugh. "Watching, hell! I'm the fox."

Ha ha to you, too, thought Burke, think you're funny, don't you? Aloud he said, "Well, that's a new way of seeing hounds work, I guess," which his hostess seemed to find unaccountably funny, for she gave a series of short, sharp laughs. Burke joined in, and soon they were chummy as all get out, with Miss Foxer bringing in a bottle of champagne and some cold chicken. Burke outdid himself in charm and whatnot, and it wasn't long before the two of them were making love together, and Clarinda told him (they'd gotten to "Clarinda" and "Burke" by this time, as well they might) that he was at Foxy's Hollow. The estate had originally been called Faux Air, the same as her own name, the family having come over from France a long while back.

"Faux Air . . . that means a kind of make-believe, doesn't it?" said Burke, and Clarinda told him not to get personal, and bit him playfully on the neck.

The morning came, and Burke said he didn't feel up to moving about on that ankle, and Clarinda said she should think not, and for him to lie up at Foxy's Hollow until it improved. Burke wondered aloud feebly what his host would think of his absence and Clarinda replied that he'd probably suspect the worst, and Burke was too sleepy to try to figure that one out. In mid-morning Miss Foxer told him she was going out for a while, and that there was a cold rabbit pie in the boot-cupboard if he got hungry. Burke lolled about the big empty house all day, wondering where the servants were, if any. He examined the portraits of former red-haired Foxers, peering at the signatures to see if they'd been painted by anybody worthwhile; poked around the dining hall and calculated how much, at a pinch, could be raised on the plate, and finally resigned himself to reading some poems of his hostess's which she'd dug out of an old hat box and left for his perusal, after learning he was a writer. They were terrible.

About three o'clock Clarinda came in, very sweaty and with twigs in her hair. She threw herself in a chair before the fire, and said briskly, "Saw some of your friends today. I'll bet

they're wondering where you've got to! This is Saturday country for the Peddingham, you know."

"Good Lord, I almost forgot about Bewley! What did you tell 'em, baby?"

"Tell them! I can't talk to anyone when I'm out! I've told you, Burke—I'm a fox."

"Oh, sure," nodded the American. "O. K., you're a fox. How could I have forgotten?" (Could this babe be a looney? But a gorgeous job, at that!)

"I am, too, a fox," insisted his hostess, facing him suddenly and looking so alert that Burke almost expected her ears to prick up. "Quite likely you find that hard to believe, but I've *been* a fox, confound it, since 1789! I've been running before Peddingham hounds and old Bewley and his ancestors for two hundred years, almost. And though it's been devilish close at times I've never been caught yet—and won't be, as long as I can get back to this house. Not that it looks like a house now to 'em," she added oddly.

"Why don't they ever chase a real fox?" (This was crazy talk, but kind of cute.)

"Why, they do! Been a good many tods around here that haven't gotten clean away like myself. Friends of mine, too." She sighed. "Poor little devils."

"Well, why do you let 'em run

you? Should think you'd just hole up here." (If she wanted to keep up this screwy conversation Burke was her boy.)

Clarinda carefully pulled a thorn from her right thumb. "Can't—against Rules. You see, sweetheart, it's my Doom. Have to let 'em chase me, And I get a kind of kick out of it." She giggled. "And I do rob their hen roosts."

She grew solemn. "You see, Burke, I used to dabble in witchcraft when I was a girl. Runs in my family. And I got mixed up with a wizard. Big, black-eyed fellow from Sligo. We got into a bit of a hum one night at a Sabbat. He claimed I kicked him while we were dancing—maybe I did—God knows I was stinking drunk. Anyway, he was furious! Black Irish temper. He turned me into a fox. On account of my red hair and my name, naturally." She stared dreamily into the fire. "He was a romantic old beggar."

When she found out she was a fox (she continued) she hid out in the woods. She was ashamed of letting the servants and her father see her. She had hung around the house at night and old Mr. Foxer used to put out dead pheasants and small animals for her until she got accustomed to foxy ways. But he died soon afterwards—"I'd

ruined his huntin', you see. He never knew if he were chasing his own daughter. Deuced awkward."

Then it seemed that the servants started leaving, Faux Air was empty, so she moved in. But the country people claimed it was haunted and one night they burned it down. . . .

"What?" shouted Burke at this point. For a minute he'd gotten quite a shock, she sounded so serious!

"Oh, yes! They said it was a very mischancey place," she went on cheerfully. "So I just moved what had *been* the house into another dimension, bag and baggage. I can always move it back—temporarily—for various reasons." She leaned over to Burke, smiled and patted his knee. "And it hasn't been at all bad, being a fox. I get exercise with the Peddingham, and I've kept up with current styles and all that sort of thing, by sneaking around Bewley Hall during week ends. Bewley always has had a very *tonish* crowd. And of course that wizard permits me to keep my own shape while I'm in here. Has to—in the Rules, you know. He even keeps an eye on me to see I don't really come to any harm. Always was a bit of a cake about me."

"After two hundred years

that guy still gets about? Some wizard!"

"Oh, yes! Dashed good one. Sociable fellow, too. Likes huntin' and all that."

"You're nuts, baby, but I love you," said Burke. (She was a screwball, all right! Might be able to use some of this in a story, though.)

Crazy or not (Burke forebore to say "crazy like a fox") Clarinda was a gorgeous job and he stayed on at Foxy's Hollow. The days passed, all pretty much alike. When Clarinda wasn't out in the hunting-field they'd doze together in front of the fire. At dusk his companion would rouse herself and get lively as anything. They'd drink champagne and snap wishbones, or play piquet, or argue about breeds of foxhounds, or make love, and then Clarinda would slip out of the house and stay for all hours. The next day they'd have chicken for dinner.

It was after Burke had been at Foxy's Hollow for about a week (as he reckoned it) that he began to notice things. Although he seemed to be as drowsy as Clarinda in the daytime now, he still spent less time in bed than she did, and in his prowls about the silent house he noticed quite a lot. Item: the little leaded windows with their painted panes of purple, red and amber cast a

peculiar light in the room that was exactly like that in an autumn wood when the sun is shining. Item: although nobody came to the house and neither his hostess or himself lifted a hand to clean the place, the beds were made up daily and the dishes washed. Item: one of the Foxer portraits, a young woman in lilac lutestring and patches, bore a remarkable resemblance to Clarinda and the date on it was 1786. Item: however freely he could walk *in* the house, he couldn't seem to open any doors to go *out* of it, although its owner popped in and out at will. Item: its owner's nose was really very pointed and her teeth very white and sharp, and she cracked goose-bones with them. She also had a damned foxy laugh. Could it be possible . . . ? Was she really a . . . ? Burke began to wonder

One night he had a disturbing experience. He'd gotten up for a perfectly natural reason and happened to glance out of the bedroom window. Instead of the formal garden with its well-trimmed shrubbery and autumn-brown lawns, he saw something quite different. There were no lawns, only wet leaves, and brambles and docks growing all over. The privet peacocks were indistinguishable, and there certainly were a lot more hollies

and yew-trees about than he'd thought. And what was that heap of rocks doing over there where the stables should be?

Burke was thoughtful as he went back to bed.

The next morning he looked at Clarinda, who'd come in about dawn, lying curled up in a ball amid a tangle of red hair, and uncommonly foxy she looked, too. I'm getting out of here, he said to himself.

But he didn't. He wouldn't admit it, but the poor fellow was spellbound. Doors wouldn't open to let him out. Those curious little windows seemed to be glued fast. Of course there was no telephone. It looked as if he really *was* stuck in the fourth dimension or whatever it was, ha, ha, ha, ha, with this awful doll, this witch, this . . . this . . . *fox!* Burke now spent all his time, while his companion was asleep or outside, in roaming the house looking for a way out.

The Peddingham was due around again one day and Clarinda left about noon—"to have another go at the little bastards," she told him—and Burke roved about in desperation. First, however, he locked the front door against her sudden return, muttering bitterly as he did so, "I can shut myself in, all right, but I can't get out."

All at once he heard a terrible baying and barking and yapping coming nearer and nearer, and then a wild scrabbling at the door. He knew what *that* was—it was Clarinda. There was a frenzied squalling and vixenish squawking. He knew what *that* was, too. It was Clarinda saying, "Let me in, Burke, and be devilish quick about it!"

Burke stood a moment pulling at his jaw and listening to the noises. Then he walked to the door and drew down the big old fashioned bolt. Now the door was locked and bolted.

"Just try to get in now, Miss Foxy Foxer," he gritted.

There was more scrabbling and fumbling, then a regular pandemonium of sounds—doggy noises, hooves, and the high, hoarse note of a horn. Then some more hubbub, a cheer, and the sounds moved away. All was quiet.

Very quiet. Burke felt cold and a little dizzy. He thought he heard a small voice, high above him and growing fainter, say, "All right for you, Burke Bennett!" Then the walls of the house gave a shake, and then they weren't there. He was standing in a wooded hollow, full of wet leaves and brambles. There was no house. There was some crumbled masonry, a great many hollies and beeches and

overgrown privet, but no house.

At his back was a hole in the stones of what had probably once been a cellar, almost hidden by nettles and vines. In front of it were some bones and reddish fur, or hair, with blood on them. The hole had been neatly stopped up with stones—from the inside.

Burke shuddered. Man, what a dream he'd had! Must have knocked himself out when he took that spill in the morning! And still in the middle of Hawkshire with this damned ankle. . . . He heard hooves and looked up. A man on a big hunter was looking down at him. With a sigh of relief, Burke recognized him as one of Lord Bewley's house guests.

"Gillegan! Am I glad to see you!" Burke lifted a hand in greeting. He felt an unpleasant shock go through him. He looked at his hand.

Hand! It was a paw. He looked down at himself. He was a large red fox.

He heard Gillegan give a whistle, and then a whole pack of hounds could be heard coming towards them, giving tongue happily.

He looked up. Gillegan was smiling down at him in a very nasty way. His eyes were black and shining.

"Start running," said the Irish wizard.

Mr. Mottle Goes Pouf

BY LAURENCE MANNING

Mr. Mottle had his problems, but he was chiefly concerned over the fact that they might not be his problems, after all. If his thoughts couldn't be tamed, that is, there might be a lot of people with no problems at all, ever!

"Just relax," said Dr. Forthby. "Try not to think of things."

Mr. Mottle threw himself back on the couch and shut his eyes.

"What sort of things would be best, Doctor?" he asked briskly.

"I don't believe I understand . . ." began Dr. Forthby.

"Not to think of, you know," explained his visitor.

"But my dear sir! I want you to think of nothing; nothing whatever."

Mr. Mottle's face took on a dubious expression. He screwed his eyes tighter and wrinkled his forehead in obvious effort.

The psychiatrist sighed. "I'm afraid you don't quite get the idea," he said patiently. "I want you to relax, to sweep all thought from your mind."

"Can I use sawdust?" Mr. Mottle's voice was hopeful.

Dr. Forthby's was not. He

had had a hard day. "Sawdust?" he said. "Sawdust!"

"It would be easier to sweep out something definite like that. Cleaners always use sawdust. But I won't, if you'd rather not. Anything I can make a picture of will do instead—clouds, door-sills, cauliflower—I don't care. But then, perhaps you don't like cauliflower either. Lots of people don't."

Dr. Forthby gave a noticeable start. He stroked the back of his head as though brushing away some unrevealed impulse.

"Really, Mister—ah—Mister Mottle. Now try to be a good patient. Just relax. Don't think at all. It's quite easy."

"But it isn't—not for me," complained Mr. Mottle. "It *would* be if you'd only give me something definite to picture. You see, I know exactly how to sweep a picture from my mind."

The doctor hesitated and

asked patiently, "How do you do that?"

His visitor eagerly explained: "I just go *pouff!* and they vanish. Like the figures set up in a computator, you know, when you press the clearing lever."

He stopped, stared at the doctor's amused expression, frowned, and then said belligerently: "You don't believe me, do you? Well, I *can!* Any picture at all—except an idiosyncrasy, perhaps, I was never rude enough to try that, but I could if I wanted to."

Dr. Forthby, looking for something upon which to start a more professional conversation, was torn still further adrift from familiar moorings, but maintained polite interest.

"Idiosyncrasy?" he repeated.

"A person having one, I mean, of course. Almost everybody does. Mr. Weardon, my boss, can't think without pulling the lobe of his ear." Mr. Mottle shut his eyes. "I can see him now," he continued, "pulling away . . . no, he's stopped. He's just staring at me . . . staring as if he was afraid, perhaps."

"Think of something else," suggested the doctor hastily.

"Somebody else, you mean. Things don't have idiosyncrasies, doctor. How about the man at the corner grocery—will he do? He keeps rubbing the coun-

ter with the palm of his hand while he talks. There it is now—rubbing. I suppose I could make him vanish if you want me to." Mr. Mottle screwed his eyes still tighter and puffed out his cheeks. Then he hesitated, let his breath go again with a great sigh, and opened his eyes.

"I haven't the heart, Dr. Forthby. He stopped rubbing and looked so frightened, standing there behind his counter. You'll have to suggest something else I'm afraid—something besides sawdust or cauliflower, of course."

Dr. Forthby said, "Dear me!" and shook his head. He picked up his notebook and in a firm hand wrote "MOTTLE" at the top of a page.

"Mr. Mottle," he said impressively, "we simply must not continue like this. Relax any way you please. It doesn't matter—I say it does *not* matter what you think about. Now, just when did you first notice that your friends seemed to avoid you?"

"Before I came here to the city. The last month I worked with Dr. Alsop he had begun looking queerly at me. I can't think why. I had been there for years; why, when I started with him it was still called the Manhattan Project."

"You worked on atomic research? I see."

"Up to three months ago. Oh, not one of the important jobs. I'm just a glorified bookkeeper, really. I do statistics now for Mr. Weardon—insurance statistics. You know, checking rates against average losses from accidents; automobiles, step-ladders, bathtubs—that sort of thing."

"Yes, yes. But your previous work; did it subject you to actual radiation at any time?"

"How did you know that? It shouldn't have, but one day the Geiger inspector found our whole office was hot—probably had been for a week or more. We had to move to a new building and have the furniture tested piece by piece. It was something spilled on the rug. But that was years ago; Dr. Alsop was normal until just recently."

"What exactly did he do then?"

"Nothing in particular. He began to look strangely at me mornings when I came to the office. He'd give just a frightened sort of nod, without smiling. So I'd hang up my hat and go to my desk. Then after awhile he'd suddenly start to act perfectly all right again for the rest of the day. Next day, likely as not, it would all begin again."

"Didn't you ever ask what was the matter?"

"One day I did. I'd taken some papers home to work on and when I came in next morning I went right to his desk. He shrank away, so I slapped them down in front of him and said, 'Look here, Dr. Alsop, is there something the matter with my face?' and he put out his hand to touch the papers, as if he had to force himself to do it. But when he touched them, he gave a gasp of relief and said, 'Why there's nothing the matter with your face, nothing at all, my dear fellow—no indeed!' talking fast and looking embarrassed."

"Were the papers something important?"

"No. He didn't even read them until later. No, it was the actual touch that seemed to reassure him, as if he hadn't believed the papers were real—though that's silly, isn't it? . . . But how about Mr. Weardon? How about the groceryman? How about all my friends here?"

"He had been exposed to radiation too, you said?"

"Of course; we were in the same office . . . Oh, I see. You think it may have done something to him."

"We know very little about the effect of atomic radiation on the human brain, Mr Mottle."

"Hm. These people seem to be-

have much the same way as your Dr. Alsop, do they? Tell me about one of them. Tell everything just the way it happened."

"Well, there was Anne . . ." Mr. Mottle hesitated. "She slapped my face," he said in a hurried mutter.

"Did she say why?" asked the doctor, scribbling rapidly in his notebook.

"She said I was a miserable peeping-Tom. Doctor, I hadn't been near her for a week. We had a date to go to the movies together Saturday afternoon. When I called for her she opened the door, said that, slapped my face, and slammed the door shut again. That's all I know about it."

"You had not seen her for a week before that, eh?" said Dr. Forthby, looking doubtful.

Mr. Mottle blushed. "Well," he said, "not to really see her. I had pictured her once or twice in my mind. The night before, I remember, I was sitting with my eyes shut, just dreaming you know . . ."

"And?"

"Oh . . . she had been getting undressed for bed, so I apologized and opened my eyes again quick."

"Where were you? In your own room?"

Mr. Mottle looked at him somberly and nodded. "I'd been read-

ing. It was late. I leaned back in my chair and closed my eyes for two seconds—that was all. Do you suppose she saw me, Doctor, when I saw her? All my friends—they're afraid of something you know. It sounds crazy, but do you suppose they're afraid I'm not really there, sometimes?"

"I'm not sure of your exact meaning."

"Well," Mr. Mottle cleared his throat. "Look here. If they saw me every time I shut my eyes to picture them, mightn't they mix up the real and the visionary?"

"But surely, Mr. Mottle, they can't see a vision of yours, you know. A vision is something that exists only in the mind of the person who has it. It cannot possibly be broadcast to others. There must be some other explanation for all this."

"I don't pretend to explain it, Doctor. I just wonder, that's all. You say yourself you don't know all the effects of atomic radiation on people's minds."

"How did you come to leave Dr. Alsop?" asked the doctor.

"Well, the personnel director wouldn't give any reason, but I wasn't the only one they let go about that time. They only gave me a week's notice, though they did disgorge two months' salary. Dr. Alsop was away that week, but he couldn't have done

anything for me if he'd been there."

"Did you see him again?"

"No, I never did. I left a good-bye note, of course; and he answered it saying how sorry he was and all that." Mr. Mottle closed his eyes. "I can picture him now, scratching his chin with one finger and staring at me the way he used to. His eyes . . . they're afraid, that's what I think. He's grown a little heavier in the past few months."

"You see very vivid pictures of people, don't you?"

"Just as if I stood right beside them," answered Mr. Mottle.

Dr. Forthby looked at him thoughtfully. "Are you still seeing Dr. Alsop?"

"No. I'm seeing you now," was the answer. "You have a peculiar way of rubbing the back of your head with your left hand—did you know?"

Dr. Forthby quickly brought his hand to the desk and peered doubtfully at Mr. Mottle's tightly closed eyes. He was silent a moment, then he pursed his lips and nodded to himself.

"Did you ever wonder, Mr. Mottle, if perhaps all the people are all in a conspiracy to deceive you? That everything you are permitted to see and hear is just pretense and as soon as you have gone away everyone talks about

you and plans what to do next?"

"His patient sat up, wide-eyed.

"How terrible!" he exclaimed.

"When did you begin to feel that way, Doctor?"

Dr. Forthby laughed a little uncomfortably. "We are discussing your case, not mine. I have no such ideas myself."

"Then how," pointed out Mr. Mottle shrewdly, "how did you know exactly what it felt like."

The doctor pounced. "Then that is an exact description?"

Mr. Mottle looked solicitous. "All I know is your description seemed exact—precise if you prefer that word. Are you sure you don't feel . . . but there, I'm the patient, not you, of course."

Dr. Forthby breathed heavily and seemed to be discouraged.

"We simply *must* find some way to bring all this down to real life, Mr. Mottle," he said at last. "You have a very strong imagination indeed, but you surely realize the difference between pictures in your mind and real flesh-and-blood people. You must realize there is something abnormal about these visions of yours. Of course you do; that's why you are here asking me to help you. Now I notice that you have a strong mental resistance against . . . *pouffing* . . . the vision of a living person. I want you to picture some acquaintance and *pouff* him—here and now,

please. I believe in facing fancy with fact, Mr. Mottle."

Obediently, Mr. Mottle shut his eyes. There was a minute of silence. Then he said: "Hello, Dr. Alsop! I never got back to say good-bye properly. I want . . . the fact is, my doctor wants . . . excuse me a minute, please, I'll be right back."

He opened his eyes reproachfully upon Dr. Forthby and whispered urgently: "Look here, I just can't do it, Doctor."

Dr. Forthby leaned forward impressively. "I suggest there is no need of preliminary conversation with your mental image of this Dr. Alsop."

"Mental image? Yes, I suppose that's all he is." Mr. Mottle looked dubiously around the office and once again closed his eyes. He screwed his face into a determined appearance, gulped, blushed, puffed out his cheeks and said, "*Pouff!*"

Sudden dismay struck his countenance. Eyes still shut, he leaped to his feet sending the chair crashing to the floor.

"Good Lord! I didn't mean to hurt you, sir . . . I didn't know it would knock you over. I hope you're not badly hurt, Dr. Alsop? There . . . you can get back to your feet, anyway . . . don't look at me that way, please! I didn't mean it, I tell you! Keep away . . . Keep off me!" His

voice rose to a shout; his arm, palm out warded an imaginary blow.

Dr. Forthby stepped briskly over to his side and rested one hand gently on his shoulder. Mr. Mottle opened his eyes.

"It's all right," said the doctor. "Only the two of us here in my office. Let me set this chair upright so you can sit down."

Mr. Mottle said: "I hope you know what you're doing, doctor."

Dr. Forthby looked as if he hoped so too, but was silent. He sat down at his desk and picked up his pencil to write the word "mania" on the pad, but added a questionmark after it.

Mr. Mottle said: "I might have killed him, you know!" He was silent for awhile, frowning. His face brightened.

"Say! If I could kill Dr. Alsop, I could kill anybody I liked—didn't like, I mean of course. Why, if I'd realized my powers in time I could have stopped the war. I could have *pouffed* out Hitler himself! I'm a secret weapon, that's what I am. I ought to go down to Washington and get put on the Army payroll. Thank goodness you were here all the time, Doctor. They'd never believe me at all if I didn't have you to back up my word about what happened."

Dr. Forthby's pencil scratch-

ed out the questionmark. He answered slowly:

"All I saw was you sitting in your chair, until you jumped out of it. All I heard was you talking, Mr. Mottle. All I know is what you tell me. You are the one who has this . . . this gift . . . not me."

"That's so. But—oh well, you could phone Dr. Alsop's office couldn't you?" His face fell. "I wish you hadn't made me *pouff* him. He didn't like me too much before that, but now—you should have seen the way he glared at me. He'd have killed me if he could! Still, it was a sort of accident. You didn't know what would happen. He got to his feet right away, so he couldn't have been badly hurt. Why don't you phone him? Or shall I?"

"If he denied everything, would it convince you that it was all your imagination?"

"But why would he deny it? It happened!"

Dr. Forthby shook his head impatiently. "Will you admit that you *might* have imagined it all?"

"Well . . . of course . . . I *might*."

The psychiatrist nodded at the phone. "Dial his number. I'll speak to him."

Mr. Mottle dialed. Dr. Forthby took the receiver.

"Dr. Alsop's office? May I speak to Dr. Alsop please?"

In the pause his pencil made a heavy line under the word on the pad before him. Then he turned to the phone. "My name is Forthby, Dr. Forthby. I am speaking for a patient of mine, a Mr. Mottle . . . my address? It is 740 West 42nd Street, but why . . . yes, Mr. Mottle is here with me now . . ." The phone snarled a half minute and ceased with a loud click.

Dr. Forthby turned to his patient with doubt on his face.

"He seems to be a rather unreasonable man, Mr. Mottle. He says he is going to take steps immediately so that this continual persecution stops, whatever that means. I understood you to say you had not been near him for some months?"

"He's furious at me. Well, I can't help that. I hope you're convinced now, Dr. Forthby. May I call Washington and tell the War Department about me? I suppose it's our duty as good citizens to do that, isn't it? I really ought to have an armed guard, I suppose. If the least inkling of all this were to leak out there'd be enemy agents after me for sure."

Dr. Forthby looked convinced at last. His pencil wrote the word "dangerous" on the pad and he tore off the sheet to slip

into the drawer of his desk before he answered.

"I could get you in a safe place for a day or two, if you are worried. Perhaps it would be better in view of this extraordinary occurrence. Few places are safer than a private room in the hospital, with an interne on guard. Then, with you safe, I could get in touch with Washington. I think they'd be more likely to believe me, rather than you."

Mr. Mottle nodded. "Good," he said. "It is an extraordinary affair come to think of it. Perhaps your way would be best—I'd hardly believe it myself if I hadn't been through it all. Where is this hospital of yours?"

"I'll go with you," said the doctor, getting to his feet.

Mr. Mottle leaped suddenly from his chair and dodged behind it, staring with alarm at the right side of the room. He gripped the back of his chair defensively and nervously licked his lips.

Dr. Forthby's hand had reached toward the buzzer-button on his desk, but as Mr. Mottle seemed quiet for the moment, he relaxed, glanced around the empty office, and frowned.

"What do you want?" Mr. Mottle whispered to the wall.

He seemed to listen, and a

startled expression spread over his features.

"But Dr. Alsop," he protested, "I don't harry you. You've got it all wrong, sir! I like you! It's *you* that . . ." he ceased talking and listened again. His lips tightened. He thrust his chin forward angrily.

"All right, then," he snapped at last. "If that's the way you want it, you can blame yourself for what happens. I hardly *pouffed* you at all, before."

More listening to the wall, while Dr. Forthby stood, cautious and alert.

"Yes, damn it!" Mr. Mottle barked, as though in answer to something. "We'll have it out now, if you want. Dr. Forthby here will see fair play. Each man steps two paces forward and the doctor will give the signal to . . . to fire, I suppose it is."

He turned, cool and imperturbable all of a sudden.

"If you will be so kind, sir, when we have taken our positions, count three slowly. Then drop your handkerchief."

Mr. Mottle pulled back his shoulders into military straightness. He strode with dignity over to the wall behind him and turned. Then, watching the opposite wall, he took two slow paces forward, to stand waiting. After a moment's pause, he

announced in a low voice, "We are ready, Dr. Forthby."

Dr. Forthby glanced at the door that led out of the room, then at Mr. Mottle, who had buttoned his coat and was standing stiffly at attention.

"Very well, if your . . . if Dr. Alsop is ready . . ." he gravely inspected the blank wall on his right for a measured moment and cleared his throat.

"One."

Mr. Mottle tensed.

"Two."

Mr. Mottle breathed in an enormous lungful of air.

"Three."

Mr. Mottle puffed out his cheeks, face purple, eyes bulging.

The handkerchief fell to the carpet.

"*Pouff!*" went Mr. Mottle.

Dr. Forthby's jaw dropped. He stared swiftly at the door, still tightly shut, at the window, open an inch for air, at the unrevealing walls, the floor, the ceiling.

Then he sank back into his seat with the look of a man whose whole civilization had come crashing about his head.

There before him lay the handkerchief; there stood the empty chair in the middle of the room; there rested Mr. Mottle's hat on the small table near the door.

But Mr. Mottle had vanished.

There's a serious effort being made to bring the facts of modern science fiction and fantasy to the attention of the broadest possible group of readers. HE and DARE, two of the brief, hard-hitting, fact-packed magazines that still sell for only a dime apiece, are making regular features of the ideas and events of the whole field.

These capsule magazines have done yeoman service in many fields. For the man who wants to find out what really goes on in the news behind the news, as well as fashion, sports, and coverage of all entertainment, they provide the best possible means of getting this information.

We're happy to see them turning to the future as well as to the immediate present. And we're even happier to see that they will give attention to the fact that fantasy isn't just a collection of ghosts and horrors. After some of the cracks we've seen, such honest reporting is more than welcome.

THE CRYSTAL BALL

WE'VE GOT ONE PREDICTION to get off our chests before we go into crystal gozing—one which takes na clairvoyance of any kind! We've been getting some of the most enthusiastic letters from readers we've ever seen, but most of them seem to be filled with worry about whether we can keep it up, and whether we're going to start changing format, type of stories, etc., etc.

The answer is simple and definite: We've been publishing and editing this magazine for our own joy in fantasy; we weren't even sure that such a magazine could be run without losing money, but we still wanted it badly enough to take the chance; we love it just as we might love a first son and heir; we are not planning any drastic changes, though we'll try to get better and better stories inside!

Incidentally, we've found already that our own fears were unfounded. There are obviously enough readers who love fantasy as much as we do to make it very definitely profitable. With such ideal readers and an apparently inexhaustible supply of top-notch stories coming in, we're in a kind of seventh heaven.

Many of those stories are by newer writers, or writers new to fantasy. Our lead novel next issue will be by a new team—though both have written excellent material individually. Katherine MacLean and Harry Harrison have done a bang-up job of fantasy-adventure in *THE WEB OF THE WORLDS*. It deals with a man who was woven into the fabric of fate all wrong, and the efforts of the Weavers to pick up the pattern in all the worlds it touches. A nuisance for Them—and rough on him—but a lot of fun for the rest of us.

We've also found that some of the old-time masters of fantasy can still come through with stories that prick up and dawn the backbone. We hesitate to say how long Clark Ashton Smith has been a writer of fantasy. But we'd come to associate him with the grim and grisly story, full of all the words from the grimoire, dealing with things worse than death. Wonderful work, but not our type, of course. So we picked up his story with some doubts. Turned out we were all wet—the yarn was as neat and simple in handling as it was sharp and pointed in idea—exactly the sort of story we've been looking for. It deals with an effort to psychoanalyze the Devil, and it's a story that shouldn't be missed.

There'll also be L. Sprague de Camp and a host of the top fantasy writers, new and old. All in all, we think you'll agree it was worth watching for!

THE OTHER ONES

BY DAVID ALEXANDER

ILLUSTRATED BY TYLER

There was a curse on the two others, in this strange borderland where only hatred could keep a soul awake. They were doomed to howl by night, while Jesse James and Jack the Ripper slept.

The car roared along at a steady seventy-five.

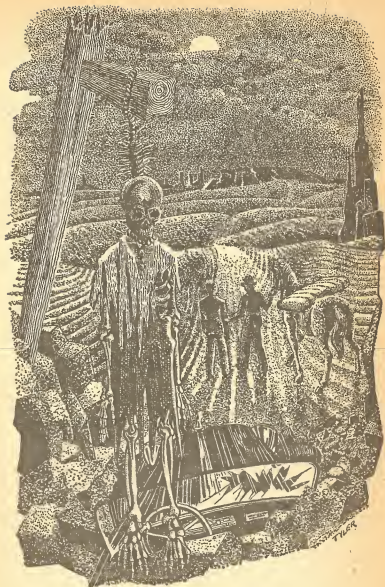
I thought it must be New Mexico or maybe Arizona I was passing through now. Days of traveling on the side roads, the rutted roads, the roads that were little more than forgotten trails make a man lose all sense of geography, and the maps in the glove compartment of the big car I had stolen were of little help in this wild and desolate place.

I had never seen such a place before. Miles and endless miles of gold-brown sand. Tabletop mesas shining purple and glowing green. Cliffs of solid rock that rose suddenly and senselessly out of the sand, in shapes that were appallingly weird. Some were sharp-pointed, like enormous daggers bloodied by the setting sun. Some were topped by crooks, mammoth question

marks that asked the answer to eternal mysteries. Some were monolithic upthrusts that divided themselves in two and stretched beseeching arms to Heaven in mute appeal.

There was no life. No life at all. Only the bleached bones of animals showed that life had once existed here. Just once, miles back, I had seen a human skull. Even the slithering motion of a snake would have been welcome on this moon-still landscape.

I had to find gas. The quivering little arrow showed the tank was perilously low and there were only two five-gallon cans left in the trunk of the car. The gasoline in them would not take me far in this grim immensity. And I had to find a human being, no matter how great the risk, for I must ask the way to Mexico. I must find some other



life before the looming night poured down on me—or before I fell asleep.

I glanced at my watch. Nearly forty hours. It was almost forty hours now since I had slept. I had slept in the car then, in a clearing beside a red-dirt road in the Deep South.

I was running, of course. I had been running for days now, ever since the Secretary was killed in Washington. In the wild confusion of that moment I had escaped, and I had been running ever since. First it was a bus and then a freight train and now a stolen car. I should have been in Mexico by now, except I'd had to take the byways and much of the time I'd been completely lost. I couldn't use the main roads, of course. There was no adequate description of me, but every police officer in the United States was seeking me. And even worse, The Party might be after me. I had bungled, and The Party doesn't tolerate those who bungle.

I hadn't been sent out to kill the Secretary. It was the President I was supposed to kill. But in that second when the machine pistol had begun to spit, the Secretary had jumped into the line of fire to shield his chief.

And so I was running. Running from every man who wore a badge—and from those more

dangerous men who had no badges, who looked just like everyone else. The quiet and unobtrusive men. The Party's killers.

The twilight tinted this unearthly land with fantastic colors. Great, hump-backed shadows spilled over the gold-brown surface of the sand. As the car sped by, the sprawling shadow-shapes seemed to wallow and cavort obscenely. I spoke aloud and said, "I must be asleep. This is a madman's nightmare. There is no place like this."

As darkness fell the great rock formations moved together to form a wall of cliffs on each side of the car and presently they were so close that the old, forgotten trail I traveled was like a narrow tunnel through a stone mountain, and the sun had suddenly gone. There was only the black curtain of night now and I switched on the headlights. I screamed aloud at what loomed just ahead.

On a gibbet of decaying wood, hanging from strands of rotten rope, was a human skeleton.

I swerved the car to miss the tilting gallows and its grisly burden. I clamped on the brakes and there was a roaring all around me. Great boulders were falling from the cliffs, before me, behind me, directly over me.

I was caught in an avalanche, and this was the end at last.

When I awakened, there were great piles of rock around me in the canyon between the Cliffs and the glittering brass world of a desert day had changed to silver softness. The cold of the desert night was the cold of the space between the worlds.

A man stood over me. He was a lean, hard man, dressed in the kind of farmer's work clothes that have hardly changed at all in a century or more. He wore a slouch hat of the western type. I could see him quite plainly in the moonlight, and he seemed neither young nor old. His eyes were what I noticed most. They were pale, cold eyes that had looked on death and violence.

He spoke softly in a voice that seemed both of the South and the West. "Quite a job digging you out from under, friend," he said. "You can get up now. You won't be feeling pain."

I looked at him uncertainly. I had been crushed beneath an avalanche. Yet I felt no hurt at all. I rose and steadied myself against the rock wall of the cliff. His pale eyes looked me over.

"You're the first one's come here in a long time, friend," he said. "The last two that came, we never speak of them. John—he's pretty much of a snob, I

guess—says they ain't our kind. And old Jack, he just says they ain't nice. Not nice at all, he says."

I looked at the awesome pile of boulders and the crushed remnants of the car. "It must have been a miracle," I said. "I don't seem hurt at all."

He chuckled. "More of a miracle than you allow right now, friend," he replied. "We best get going. It's across and up a piece."

"Where am I?" I asked. "Is this New Mexico? Or Arizona?"

"It's just the place you came to, friend," he answered.

"How far is this from Mexico?" I persisted.

"No farther than from any other place, I guess," he said.

"I know who you are," he went on as I regarded him questioningly. "So I best had introduce myself. Folks call me Jesse, Jesse James."

Such a denouement was fitting enough, I thought. I had committed a mad act. I had fled madly over uncharted roads of a land that was the edge of madness. I had been crushed beneath an avalanche and had lived to be rescued by a madman who thought that he was Jesse James.

He saw the look upon my face and his thin mouth twisted into a wry grin. "I know," he said.

"It's hard to believe at first, hard to understand. It was for all of us. For John and Jack and me. And maybe for those other ones we never speak of and won't let in our castle. Come along, now. Help me lift this auto seat. It's the thing you'll have to sleep on—when they let you sleep. They never let you sleep right at first. The two we never speak of—the other ones—don't sleep at all. They will never sleep."

"I'll sleep all right," I told him. "I haven't slept for forty hours."

"I know," he replied. "It was just forty hours ago they found you dead in the car you crashed on an old dirt road in Mississippi. You got here pretty fast, considering. It took me weeks, months, maybe, when I came a long, long time ago. I had to ride my old horse here. They let me keep my horse. It was kind of a favor, I guess. Folks always seemed to like me in spite of the things I did."

"So you think I'm dead?" I asked.

"It's hard to explain," he said, throwing the auto seat across the old horse's back and securing it to the pommel and the girth. "You're dead and yet you ain't. Not quite, that is. You're like me and John and Jack. And the other ones we never speak

of. Come along. I'll try to explain it on the way. We'll lead the horse. The castle's not too far. Just across and up a piece."

He tugged at the reins of the skinny old horse and made a clucking sound. We set off across the moon-bathed desert where no life stirred or fluttered, through a night as soft and still as a coffin's satin depth.

Jesse said, "It's funny in a way, being dead and yet not quite. It's like a man who don't sleep good. Most murderers, they take 'em out and break their necks or shoot 'em dead or chop their heads right off with a thing they call the guillotine. Or even if they don't get caught, they die in bed some day. But some they won't let die, even when they're dead. And they won't forget the crimes and murdering they done. The people who are still alive won't let 'em die, I mean. It's only when the living ones convince themselves you're dead or forget you altogether that you lie down and close your eyes and the big rest sets in for good."

The man who called himself Jesse James guided the old horse around a crater in the sand. "Take me for instance," he continued. "Bob Ford shot me in the back that day and killed me dead. The big rest set right in and I was quiet and

peaceful. I had a proper funeral with a stout pine coffin and flowers on top of it and even a parson saying prayers for me. Then a few days later folks started wagging their tongues and saying the man who was buried fitting deep wasn't Jesse James at all but some ringer and that old Jesse had run away and hid somewhere, and maybe was a-setting in some cave counting up the loot he'd stole. And so I had to harness up the horse and ride off here. It was a right far piece on horseback. I grew mighty tired before we finally come to the signpost."

"The signpost?" I asked.

Jesse nodded. "The signpost which points to the place we're in, wherever it is. The skeleton hanging by the rotten rope. Second or so after you sight it, the boulders come a-thudding down and you've arrived, though just where you are, it's hard to say."

Jesse clucked to the old horse. He said, "We got a name for it, though. We call it Murderer's Mesa."

"You mean there are only murderers here?"

Jesse nodded. "Dead murderers," he said. "Dead, but not quite dead, if you can understand. The murderers the living ones won't believe are dead, and won't forget. There's not so

many now. Just me and John and Jack. And the other ones."

"But I never quite thought of you as a murderer," I said. "You were a robber, a highwayman."

Jesse said, "Some got killed. Sheriffs and peace officers and railroad guards and Pinkertons. And the innocent bystanders on the streets the times we staged the raids." He shook his head. "I never held so much with killing," he added. "But it was all part of our work, of course."

It seemed that hardly any time at all had passed, but we had traversed great distances. Just ahead a mesa loomed and on top of it a weird, imposing structure gleamed palely beneath the silver-staring moon.

"That's it," said Jesse. "The castle where we stay."

"I've heard of Ivory Towers," I told him, "but this is the first time I ever saw one."

Jesse chuckled. "It's kind of like ivory, I guess," he said. "It's made of bones."

"Bones?" I asked.

Jesse nodded. "The bones of murdered men, they say."

As we drew closer, I saw that the top of the mesa was not really flat, but was roughly serrated. On one of the rises outside the macabre castle two extraordinary figures were sil-

houetted. One stomped and gesticulated with uncontained maniacal fury and the other, who appeared deformed, dragged himself behind, limping painfully.

"Who are they?" I asked, startled by the apparitions in the moonlight.

"Shhh," cautioned Jesse. "They're the ones we never speak of. The other ones. Their names taste bad in the mouths of decent men. When we have to call them anything at all we call them The Strutter and The Limper."

The trail up the mesa curved sharply and the two figures were blotted out of sight by the castle made of bones. We entered through a door of sorts, and once inside I saw the castle had no roof. The moon shed radiance like the cold light of a dead man's eye upon the grim interior of the castle built of bones. The place was sparsely furnished, to say the least. There was one bed, a four-poster with a canopy, neatly made with a patchwork quilt. There was a loosely flung pallet of straw upon the floor, and the straw was dyed with stains as brown as old, old blood. In one corner, standing against the wall, was a yellowed steel engraving in a frame and beside it lay a hammer and a nail.

Two men were awaiting us. One was a young man, mustachioed and handsome, dressed elegantly in the evening style of nearly a century ago. He wore a cape and there were starchy ruffles at his throat. But his finely made broadcloth was scorched in spots and smeared with mud and offal and with dried stains of blood, and he was festooned with wisps of straw.

The other man was very small and spindly and old, and he wore a nightshirt that hung to his ankles and a harlequin-like nightcap that gave him a surprising, jaunty look. His eyes gleamed with the intensity of the mad, but they did not seem unkind.

"Here's the new one, gents," said Jesse James, meaning me. He gestured toward the young man with the mustache, said: "Meet John Wilkes Booth."

Booth nodded courteously in my direction and made futile brushing gestures at his besmeared attire.

"I always feel I should apologize for my appearance when I first meet strangers," he said. "They shot me in a burning barn, you know." He regarded me with interest. "It may be edifying to have another political assassin here for awhile," he added. "The last who came

was a young Serb named Prinzip, back in 1914. He'd killed some Archduke, I believe. But he didn't stay for long. Right at first there was a rumor he had escaped, but the living ones soon admitted he was dead. Besides, they rather lost interest in the fellow. It seems there was a war right after the assassination. So they let him rest, and he faded away from us. Jesse and Jack tell me *I'm* beginning to fade a little now. Do you really think so? I made the mistake of killing a man they loved too much, the living ones and the ones who were yet to live. But that was nearly ninety years ago. Don't you think at last they should believe me dead? And let me rest? Why men impersonated me in carnivals and sideshows for years and one horrible fellow even exhibited what he claimed to be my ossified body!"

"What about me?" asked Jesse. "There's an old coot still running around the country, claiming that he's me."

I looked at Booth and it did seem his outlines would blur before coming into focus again, but it might have been a trick of the moonlight that poured into the roofless castle.

"You haven't mentioned me at all," said the little man in the

nightshirt querulously. "I was seventy-five the night I died! And think how long ago that was!"

"But no one ever saw you except the ones you killed," said Booth, reasonably enough, "so how could any of the living ones know for sure that you were dead?"

Jesse James said, "Our elderly friend was known in his time as Jack the Ripper."

The little old man in the nightshirt made a tch-ing sound with his tongue. "Such a vulgar name!" he said disapprovingly. "Of course, I had some part in furthering its use by signing it to the letters I wrote the newspapers. But I couldn't give my right name, could I? It would have cut short my good work." He bowed to me. "I'm pleased to make your acquaintance, sir," he said. "But that does not mean I approve your crime. I never did condone violence, you understand."

Jesse James untied the auto seat from the horse's back. He laid it on the floor. "When you sleep," he said, "this will have to be your bed. You always sleep—when they let you sleep—in the place you died, you see. But you won't sleep at once, you know. None of us can."

Booth was striding about like an actor on a stage, twirl-

ing the ends of his mustache. "I think," he said, "we had best explain the arrangements to our friend."

He turned to me. "Pray attend," he said, "because the explanation is involved and verges upon the metaphysical. When a murderer's crimes appeal greatly to the morbid imagination of the public, or when there are odd and mysterious circumstances surrounding his death, he finds himself here, forced to endure all the pains and inconveniences of living without life's compensating pleasures and comforts—simply because the living refuse to believe him dead or to forget him entirely. In time, however, the living ones come to half-believe he's dead, or the murderer and his crime are half-forgotten. When this occurs, as has in the case of all three of us here, the murderer is allowed to spend half his time in the sleep of death. Being among the Undead, he must walk at night. But at least he goes to his proper rest when the sun comes up and sleeps the peace of death so long as the sun rides in the sky.

"But right at first . . ." Booth shook his head pityingly. "Right at first, I'm afraid, you never sleep at all under such circumstances, because the memory of the crime is too fresh with the

living ones and the sensational stories concerning your escape are too often told and too widely believed. Since you live in their minds, you must give this semblance of life in the place where you find yourself. You must walk not only by night, but by day, which is a great deal worse, I assure you.

"Some of those who come here—most, I should say—stay only a very little while. The living ones accept their deaths, or, more likely, simply forget them. In that case, they merely fade away, as my encouraging friends tell me I have seemed to be fading during recent years.

"As for yourself, I wouldn't worry too much," Booth went on comfortingly. "You are a political assassin. Like most of them, you are young and entirely without reason, and the servant of some dreadful influence that has walked the world since the three of us here passed on. It has fired young and foolish minds before and sent them to rash deeds. Political assassins used to be called Anarchists, Nihilists, Nationalists or something of the sort, but now there is another name. You will fade very soon. You shot the wrong man, and the Secretary was almost unknown—he'd just been appointed, in fact. His death

and your crime will be forgotten almost overnight. It might have been quite different, of course, had you really hit the President. It's really too bad, though, that you couldn't have died in the usual way—been shot down right after the deed so that there'd have been a corpus delicti, and no doubt about it. But now that you're only an unidentified corpse in a car crash—there'll be some inconvenience I'm afraid."

"Inconvenience!" sputtered the little man in the night-shirt. "It's awful! Simply awful! The shrieking and the shadows!"

"You see," said Booth, "there are two who stay outside. They will never sleep at all because there is a mighty curse on them. They're quiet enough at night, but they go quite mad, it seems, when the sun comes up."

"Please! Please!" cried Jack the Ripper. "It makes me quite nauseous, really, just to mention them. They're not nice. Not nice at all."

"Old Jack suffered a touch of insomnia during his usual sleeping time awhile ago," Jesse James explained. "A crazed man in an English madhouse signed a long statement saying he was Jack the Ripper. Quite a few folks believed him. Enough to disturb Jack's daytime sleep,

anyway. So old Jack heard and saw the things that go on day-times in this place."

"Please! Please!" exclaimed the little old man in the night-shirt pettishly. "It makes my stomach quite queasy to speak of those two, and they wouldn't let me bring my rhubarb and soda along when I came here. Those other ones are vile! There, I've said it! Vile!"

I laughed aloud. "This is good," I said. "You're three of the most notorious criminals the world has ever known. The very name of Jesse James is a synonym for robbery and violence. And you, my elegant Master Booth. You murdered a man who has become a symbol for human kindness and dignity. As for the Ripper . . ." I shook my head despairingly. "Why, you're an epitome of all the horrors, you and your long, thin knife. Your name still gives honest citizens the shudders on lamplit nights. Yet all of you dare to condemn those two demented ones outside, whoever they may be. You even pretend to moral indignation!"

"You don't understand," said Jesse patiently. "Those two are cursed. We're not. They walk the world forever, day and night, and never rest. We're different. Beside those two our

guilt is small. Take me. Folks were killed, just like I said. But I never held with killing or did any out of mischief. It was in the line of business, that was all. And the ones that were killed died in a fair fight mostly, except the innocent bystanders in the raids, and those were accidents."

Booth struck a theatrical pose and pointed a slim, pale finger at me. "You dare accuse me, you whelp!" he thundered. "I was a firebrand and I killed a man in my madness because I believed he was an enemy of my people. And mark me, sir! They were a good and gallant and a gracious people. History has marked my act a mad and dreadful error. But it was an honest act, according to my lights, and a human one. I thought that I was striking a blow for my poor, defeated people. Flesh and blood people, sir! I did not act upon the orders of the robots of a twisted ideology with no thought of the human equation, as was the case with you!"

Jack the Ripper was stamping his small foot, which was encased in a bed stocking. His face was purplish and he fumed like a child in a temper.

"So you think I'm horrid, do you?" he exclaimed. "I'm a kindly and a pitying man and I never hated anyone in all my life. I

loved the ones I killed. All of them! I killed them because I loved them, don't you see? They were abandoned women, doomed to burn in hellfire. I purified them with blood. It was Heaven's will, not mine. Don't you see the police would have found me out except for Heaven's will? Why, I even wrote letters to the papers to warn them where and when my purifying knife would strike next! But I was on Heaven's work and they could not stop me. My knife was sharp and sure and almost painless. I gave them purification and eternal peace, and it's not fair the living ones should keep me from my proper rest so long!"

Booth said, "Your modern men of medicine treat the mind, I understand. They would not look upon old Jack as a vicious criminal but as a man who's sick."

Jack the Ripper stamped his small foot petulantly again. "I am *not* sick!" he flared. "I only need my proper rest, that's all. I was never sick, except for a touch of bronchial trouble. The London fogs didn't agree with me. I had to do so much of my good work in the London fogs, you know."

I shook my head, regarded my three companions and the strange place where I found myself. "I don't believe in this at

all," I said. "It's some sort of mummery and you're play-acting, that's all. I must still be dizzy. Perhaps one of the rocks hit me on the head."

Jack the Ripper tittered as if I'd made a joke. "If you don't think you're dead—or as dead as we are, anyway—just look in the mirror," he cackled.

He pointed to an object I had not seen before. It was an old-fashioned shaving mirror suspended from a jutting clavicle on the wall of bones.

"Usually we throw out the junk our guests bring along, once they've faded," Jesse James explained. "But one fellow who was struck down while he was shaving left the mirror, and we kept it. Whenever we begin to doubt, or have to convince a new one of the truth, it comes in handy."

I crossed and looked into the mirror. I could see reflected in it the interior of the house of bones and its strange furnishings. But I could not see myself at all. Jesse and John and Jack all stood directly back of me, smiling expectantly, but their images were not reflected in the mirror.

"Do you still doubt the truth?" asked Jesse James.

I shook my head. "But," I said, "why are you the only ones who're left? Through the ages

many murderers have died and yet have lived on in public fancy."

"We're the only ones the living still believe in," answered John Wilkes Booth. "The only ones they won't forget. We three and the other ones outside."

"Lots have come here in our time," said Jesse James. "They stayed a day or a month or a year or so, and then they faded."

"My goodness, yes," croaked Jack the Ripper in his old-man's voice. "During the twenties we did a particularly booming business. Most of our guests came from a place called Chicago."

"You see," said Jesse James, "in those days gangsters would get murdered and the papers would start a rumor that they weren't dead at all, but were in hiding, so they'd come here. But only for a little while. None was remembered very long, or much believed in."

"They all had foreign names," said Jack the Ripper. "Hard to spell and harder to remember." He slapped his thighs and shook with mirth. "I'll never forget the poor fellow who came here encased in cement," he declared.

The silver light had been waning and the interior of the castle built of bones suddenly became as velvet-dark as the tombs of ancient Egypt.

"The darkness before the dawn," said John Wilkes Booth in his resonant actor's voice.

"Gracious me, I must light my bed candle," cried Jack the Ripper. He scurried to the big four-poster and presently there was a wavering flame in the darkness of the weird, unearthly place. From somewhere in the outer blackness there was a thin, rasping shriek that tore at the nerves like a file on raw, sore flesh. I jumped.

"What was that?" I demanded.

"It's the other ones," said Jesse James. "The Limper and The Strutter. They can't bear the sunlight and they know the day is coming."

"They're only tuning up," said Jack the Ripper, shivering. "When the sun comes up, it's awful, the shrieking and the shadows. I don't envy you having to remain awake through the long, long day, my boy. Those other ones aren't nice companions, I can tell you. Not nice at all."

"This is one sunup I will welcome," said Jesse, stretching and yawning. "It was a job of work digging this new one from underneath that pile of rocks."

Shafts of early light as pallid as a corpse's fingers crept into the roofless place. The keening screams rose horribly in volume,

and I asked: "Does this keep up all day?"

"Oh, it gets worse," Jack the Ripper assured me. "Unendurably worse, I'm afraid."

"But why can't they be quiet? Why don't they come inside and sleep the day away as you three do?"

"We wouldn't let *those* two inside," said Jack the Ripper.

"And they will never sleep," said John Wilkes Booth. "There is a curse on them. A mighty curse."

"But how on earth can you sleep with all that screaming just outside?" I asked.

"We are not on earth," John Wilkes Booth replied with an ironic smile. "At least, not quite. And it isn't hard to sleep when the heart stops beating."

There was the sound of a cock crowing, and my three companions heaved an audible sigh of relief and satisfaction.

"The cock that isn't there," said Booth. "Now we may retire, for another of our restless nights is done. To sleep, to dream . . ."

Jesse James said politely, "You will pardon us if our conduct seems extraordinary. According to the rules, each of us must assume the exact position in which he died before he goes to rest. You may remember I was hanging a picture on the

wall when Bob Ford shot me in the back."

He strode to the corner where the steel engraving and the hammer and the nail were placed. He tucked the picture under his left arm, held the nail against the wall and struck it with the hammer once. Then he stiffened as if he felt sudden, searing pain, and crumpled to the floor. The picture and the hammer and the nail clattered down beside him. He was very still and his face was pale as death itself, but his lips were smiling.

Booth crossed to the straw pallet that was stained with old, old blood. "The final resting place of a gentleman of such aesthetic tastes that his sheets were always scented," he remarked. He lay down, gasped, and was presently quite rigid.

"I'm the only one that died in bed," said Jack the Ripper proudly, as he snuffed out his candle and turned down the patchwork quilt of the four-poster. "It was this bronchial ailment that took me off when I was seventy-five and all my good work had been done for many years." He afforded a ludicrous spectacle as he clambered into the high old bed, the night-shirt tangled around his shrivelled body. He shook his head and said, "Those London fogs!"

Then he, too, slept the sleep of death.

I went to the auto seat and lay down, hoping I, too, might sleep at last, for never before had I known the racking hurt of sheer exhaustion. I yearned for sleep as desperately as the parched want water and the famished food. But as the sun rose higher and higher the shrieking of the other ones outside rose, too, until it was so deafening and so maddening that I writhed upon the leather seat, my palms pressed against my ears and my teeth biting cruelly into my lip, lest I begin to scream myself.

It was the kind of sound that never has been heard before. In it was the shrillness of those who screamed on Torquemada's racks, the howling madness of the martyrs whose flesh was seared upon the stake, the anguished weeping of the crucified, the piteous wailing of the damned who rot with foul disease, and the insensate gibberish mouthed by maniacs.

It was the sound that only those who cannot die make.

At last madness was a gnawing in my vitals and I rose to my knees and threw back my head and began to bay like a wounded animal in hope of drowning out the unbearable

and unceasing sound. But my bellowing was all in vain for the shrieking of the other ones cut through the wall of sound as sharp and sure as Jack the Ripper's knife. I stumbled out of the house of bones and screamed, "Stop! Stop! In the name of God and all his angels, stop!"

Then I saw the other ones in the full light of the brass-bright desert day, and I stood transfixed by fear and horror.

I knew that I was looking into the blackest depth of Evil's heart, into the very core of foaming madness.

Every motion that they made, and every sound, was obscenity itself. And they were never still or silent.

Surgeons must feel like this, I thought, when first their scalpels cut into human tissue to reveal a loathesome growth.

They were just two little men, The Limper and The Strutter. To be sure, one was crippled and deformed, but this was not the horror. They seemed wreathed in the aura and the reek of foulness as they postured and shrieked in the pitiless light of the glaring desert sun.

And there was something else. They cast shadows that were as black as primeval slime, and the shadows had no end at all, but crawled down the mesa's ridge and off across the desert

waste to the horizon, and beyond. There was no life in this place, and little vegetation, but when the sprawling shadows touched a blooming cactus or a clumpy shrub, the growing thing shrivelled and was consumed at once, for the shadows of these little men were the very breath of Death.

I could distinguish no word at all in the tormented shrieking, and yet I knew for sure that the ones who cast the shadows were blaspheming all the gods that man had ever worshipped and were mocking all the good and decent things that man had ever done.

Somehow I endured the day. The twilight came at last and the shadows faded and the shrieking died. I had collapsed and I crawled on my belly back into the house of bones and lay gasping on the floor. My palms were lacerated by my digging nails and my lips were raw and bloody as a piece of butcher's beef.

As the moon rose in the sky, the others wakened. Jack the Ripper sat on the side of his bed and looked down at me.

"I say, old boy, is that you down there?" he asked. "You look a bit peaked, you know. Why—why, man, you're fading already! They're beginning to forget you. My congratulations!

In another day or so, you won't be here at all."

"I couldn't stand another day," I told him, getting to my feet.

"Was it pretty rough?" asked Jesse James. "I've never been awake at daytime since they came."

"Tell me who they are," I begged. "I've got to know."

"Now, now, my boy," said Jack the Ripper, wagging an admonishing finger. "We don't mention them."

"They're not our kind," said John Wilkes Booth.

"Not nice. Not nice at all," said Jack the Ripper.

Jesse James nodded toward the doorway, and I followed him

out of the castle made of bones. The other ones still stood on the rise, but they were silent now that night had come:

"I'm not so sensitive as those two inside," said Jesse. "I'll tell you who they are, The Limper and The Strutter.

"The limping one's a fellow called Joe. Joe Goebbels.

"The other's right name is Schicklgruber, but he's best known by his alias—Adolf Hitler."

Jesse James shook his head.

"They'll never sleep," he said.

"There's a powerful curse on them.

"They were cursed by the Wandering Jew himself."

Recently, we got a letter from a fan who had a serious complaint because he'd been missing another magazine with the same editor as this one. He'd only picked it up, he claimed, because he liked the way we handled fantasy, and wondered what we'd do with science fiction. "For Pete's sake," he wrote us, "why don't you tell the readers of the other magazines about SPACE SCIENCE FICTION? It's absolutely on a level with your work in fantasy editing, and I can't say more!"

Well, let's admit he's biased in our favor. But so are we, when we consider the powerful story by T. L. Sherred, CUE FOR QUIET. With it is one of our own yarns, LET 'EM BREATHE SPACE. We think it's a good issue, the one out now—but we'd rather leave the raves to the readers.

In other words, we've told you about it, as per suggestion. After all, we can't have anyone unhappy when he's that pleased generally. Now we'd rather have you judge SPACE for yourself. Okay?

NOM D'UN NOM

BY RANDALL GARRETT

A hundred generations spent their time and effort attempting to find the True and Secret Name of God. But even after finding the answer, there was still the matter of pronunciation. . . .

Donald Bush read through three pages of the book before he looked up in disgust.

"Hah! I thought this was fiction!"

On the far side of the room, Mark Lewis was seated at The Monster—a huge, old fashioned, roll-top desk—correcting a manuscript. When Bush spoke, he didn't look up, but his pencil paused.

"What are you reading?"

Bush shrugged. "*The Devil We Know*. I thought it was a fantasy. The title seemed familiar."

Lewis turned around, laying down his pencil. "You're thinking of a short story by Kuttner. That particular book happens to be one of the standard works of demonology."

Bush had a habit of dropping in on Mark Lewis at odd times of the day and night, mainly because of the fascinating conversations that sometimes

bloomed over a bottle of Lewis' port. Lewis was in his fifties, perhaps twice Bush's age, but the two of them shared so much the same outlook and the same likes and dislikes that the difference was hardly ever noticeable.

Lewis had been writing fantasy and science-fiction for twenty-odd years, and young Bush, having sold his fourth story, tried to think of himself as an author, too.

Both men had a habit of sleeping late on Sundays, so Bush hadn't thought anything of showing up at the older man's home at ten-thirty Saturday night. Mrs. Lewis had gone out to a neighborhood Bingo game, and Lewis himself had been deeply engrossed in making a few necessary changes in his latest novelette when Don Bush rang the doorbell.

As Lewis hadn't happened to be ready to quit his work yet,

Bush began browsing through Mark's huge collection of books, and had come across the volume under discussion.

Bush turned another page. "Demonology? Then I can presume it is fiction."

Lewis ran a hand along his temple, smoothing down the nearly pure white hair. "Not exactly. Lockhart, the author, doesn't believe in it anymore than you or I do. It's simply a—well, a history of the beliefs of the earlier peoples, with respect especially to religion. Something like *The Golden Bough*."

"Or the *Necronomicon*," grinned Bush.

The older man began to stoke his pipe. "Not exactly in the same category. Abdul Alhazred really believed what he put down. He put it down as fact.

"Look at it this way: If I say, 'There are such things as ghosts,' that isn't true. But if I say, 'Certain people in the Middle Ages believe in ghosts,' the statement is a historical fact, and worth recording as such." He struck a large kitchen match and began to puff at the long Dutch pipe.

Bush laid the book aside. He was interested, and wanted to know more, but it was easier and more enjoyable to get it out of Lewis than to get it out of Lockhart's book.

"You're talking about ghosts; let's get back to demonology. What does he—" Bush jerked a thumb at the book "—deal with? Calling up the devil so we can sell our soul for the ability to become wizards, witches, and warlocks?"

"Not entirely," replied Lewis, through a cloud of blue fumes, "That's purely Christian demonology. It was taken, mostly from the older Hebraic beliefs, as were the Moslem ideas.

"Each, of course, was modified to fit the then existing beliefs of the Arabs or the Europeans. But the very earliest basis probably sprang from the polytheistic religions of our savage, cave-dwelling forebears. There were thousands upon thousands of spirits—both good and bad—existing in the world. If these could be controlled, it would be great stuff for the person who did the controlling.

"Even when the idea of monotheism came in, it didn't do away with the concept of thousands of spirits. In modern Christianity, for instance, we still have the angels, and the Evil Hosts of Satan."

Bush stuck a cigarette in his mouth and lit it. "These spirits were supposed to be all-powerful—right?"

"Supposedly," nodded Lewis.

Bush got up and headed for the kitchen, lifting his voice so that it could be heard in the study.

"Well, then, how do you go about controlling such super-things?"

He took the chilled bottle out of the refrigerator, grabbed a couple of glasses, and returned to the study.

"Simply," Lewis answered. "Everything—including you—has a True Name. If you know the True Name of anything, you have it by the short-hair."

Bush poured. "Well, Donald James Bush is *my* true name. What can you do with that?"

Lewis waived that off. "If I say 'Donald James Bush', do you instantly appear before me, no matter where you are? No. Therefore, that isn't True Name."

Bush sipped at the wine. "They had it figured out very neatly, didn't they? I mean, if the magic didn't work, you didn't have the right words—right?"

"Precisely," Lewis agreed. "There was even more to it than that. Suppose you call on the demon Archaezel to bring a storm tomorrow, and you pronounce the name just so. Tomorrow it storms. Fine.

"Then, a couple of weeks later, you want another storm. You go

through the same rigamarole. No storm. What happened?"

"You didn't pronounce the name exactly right this time! These things have to be absolutely correct. If the mouth is held a little wrong, or the tongue comes forward a tenth of a millimeter too far, the pronunciation is off, and the demon doesn't have to obey.

"Perhaps the human ear can't tell the difference, but the sensory apparatus of the demon sure can!"

Bush mulled this over, rubbing his chin. Then:

"Hold it a minute! Assuming you've got the name absolutely perfect, you can command any spirit. Right?"

Lewis finished his wine before answering: "Right."

"Well, then, why did they think they needed all those pentacles or pentagrams or whatever, and all the mystic spells and incense and candles? What good did *they* do?"

"Ah, now there you have it," Lewis said, warming to his subject. "With the True Name, you can command any being. He *must* do it. But—and here's the kicker—it *doesn't prevent him from doing anything else he may want to do!* Understand?"

"For instance, you may conjure up an Arabian djinni and command him by his True Name

to bring you gold and jewels. He is forced to do it, but that doesn't prevent him from ripping you to pieces or carrying you off to Hell after he does it—or even before, for that matter.”

“Does make it tough,” agreed Bush, refilling his own glass, “But why couldn't you command him not to rip you up or carry you down?”

“A demon can, theoretically, be very literal in taking his commands, interpreting them to the letter instead of the spirit. If he—”

“I get you,” interrupted Bush. “If you tell him not to rip you to bits, he poisons you or—”

“Worse than that,” Lewis reassumed command of the conversation, “Suppose you give him the explicit command not to harm you. He has to obey. Then you tell him to bring you the jools. Fine. He does it.

“Next day, while you're gloating over your wealth, in comes the local constabulary and hauls you off to the town Bastille. Why? The demon got the ice by making himself look like you and murdering half the clerks in Tiffany's in the process.

“So you fry in the chair. Who did it? Not the demon. He never touched you. Get it?”

“Nasty. And that's what the pentagrams are for?” asked Don

Bush, eyeing the wine bottle again.

“Mostly,” said Lewis, complacently filling his own glass. “But actually the demon would never have to go that far, except under unusual circumstances. If you didn't have the protection of the pentagram, he would probably jump you before you could give him any command at all.”

Lewis glared at his Dutch pipe, relit it, took a swallow of port, and went on:

“So, all in all, it is better not to call up demons. If you have a *Who's Who in Spiritland*, with pronunciation, you'd do better to call up the ones that won't harm you—the Good Spirits.”

Bush raised his eyebrows. “You can conjure them up, too? Like angels and stuff?”

“Why, to be shore!” Lewis nodded. “As a matter of fact, you can do better than that. Ever hear of the Tetragrammaton?”

Bush's eyebrows lowered again. “Greek, isn't it?”

“The word is Greek. Means ‘four letters’. But the belief is Hebrew. Started about three centuries before the birth of Christ.

“They did not use the True Name of the Supreme Being, substituting, instead, four letters. They've been translated in-

to Roman script variously as YHVH, IHVH, JHWH, JHVH, and YHWH. And the name had been translated as Yahweh or Jehovah."

Bush blinked. "You mean that you could call *Him* up—or down, rather?"

Lewis nodded again. "According to the laws of demonology, you could—provided you knew the True Pronunciation."

"Hmmm, I wonder what it was?" Bush had just enough wine to wonder about such things.

"How should I know? You don't have to pronounce a name

the way it's spelled; look at Cholmondeley or Marjoriebanks. For all I know you could pronounce it—" He made a vulgar mixture of noises that couldn't possibly have been spelled.

There was no flash of light or flame. There was no smoke or noise or warning.

The Presence was standing beside them.

Bush's glass dropped shatteringly.

Lewis gasped. "Great God!"

"Quite the contrary!" snarled the Presence as it attacked.

Mark Lewis had pronounced the wrong name.

The best fantasy book in hard covers we've seen for a long time is *WITCHES THREE*, recently issued by Twayne Publishers for \$3.95. With three excellent novels and one of the best introductions to fantasy we've ever seen by John Ciardi, this superbly produced volume should be on every bookshelf. The three novels are all connected with the subject of witchcraft, but each representing a separate view. *CONJURE WIFE*, by Fritz Leiber (from the hallowed pages of the old *Unknown Worlds!*) makes the point that all women are witches, and develops it into the most emotionally suspenseful story we've seen in years. Jim Blish deals with lycanthropy and witchcraft, and sets out to show how they work in rigorous scientific care in *THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS*. And finally, Fletcher Pratt brings a brand new major novel of a world where witchcraft had been discovered instead of gunpowder. *THE BLUE STAR* is a major achievement of its type, and can only be described by saying it has to be read.

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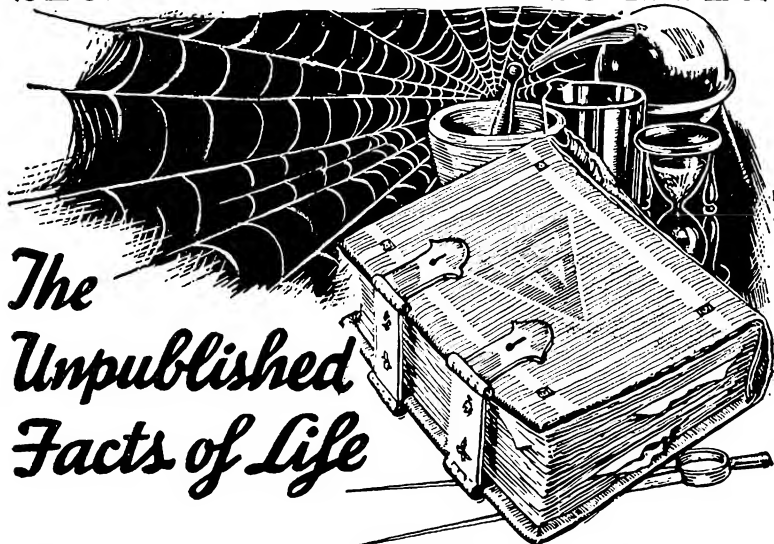
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